Madhurya-Kadambini –
Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura

Translated by Sarvabhāvana dāsa

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Śrīla Cakravartī Ṭhākura

Like cloudbanks filled with life-giving showers, may Lord Kṛṣṇa Caitanya's mercy revive the plant of my life perishing in the desert of material existence. His mercy is unrestricted, giving life to the seeds of the nine-fold path of devotion sown in the fields of the heart. The very appearance of Lord Caitanya's mercy cools the scorching heat of material life and gives joy to the entire universe.

The nine practices of devotion: to hear, chant, and remember the Lord's transcendental name, qualities, pastimes; to serve His lotus feet; to worship and pray to Him; to become His menial servant and friend; and to offer oneself in total surrender to Him are attained only by the mercy of

Lord Caitanya. The mature fruit of these devotional practices is *prema,* or love of Godhead.
The eternal associates of Lord Caitanya have preached and thereby firmly established the path of devotional service all over the world. All this has been done by Lord Caitanya's grace alone, for pure devotional service is attained solely by the blessings of the Supreme Lord and His pure devotees. The *Śāṇḍilya Sūtra* confirms this in the following verse, describing Lord Caitanya's mercy as unlimited and freely distributed. The verse further explains that no one can obtain devotion to Lord Kṛṣṇa by the process of *yoga,* the practice of austerities, or any other method except by the mercy of Lord Caitanya and His [Ed1]pure followers:

bhaktiḥ pūrvaiḥ śrita tāntu rasaṁ paśyed yadāttadhīḥ
taṁ naumi satatam rūpa-nāma-priya-janaṁ hareḥ

In the past, saintly persons have always taken shelter of devotional service. Five hundred years ago such a person appeared by whose mercy seekers are able to distinctly perceive that path of devotional service to Lord Kṛṣṇa, a path steeped in spiritual mellows. I offer my repeated obeisances to that great soul Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī, who is very dear to the Lord.
Devotees from previous ages like Uddhava, Nārada, Śukadeva Gosvāmī, Śrī Yamunacarya, Nathmuni, and others have rendered loving devotional service to the Supreme Lord. But Lord Caitanya propagated spontaneous, unalloyed devotion, and on the Lord's order Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī established this platform. This process is therefore available only to the followers of Śrīla Rūpa Goswami, and so Visvanatha Cakravarti Ṭhākura offers his invocatory prayers to Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī.

The Supreme Personality of Godhead and Brahman

The śruti or *Veda* offers irrefutable evidence that establishes the Absolute Truth. The *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* states that Brahman is the support and mainstay (*brahma-puccham pratistha*) of He who is the embodiment of unlimited absolute bliss (the Supreme Godhead), His existence being dependent on Brahman. By this statement the *śruti* gives preeminence to Brahman, although in a later verse the *Taittiriya Upaniṣad* states that the Supreme Lord is the reservoir of *rasa* or ecstatic pleasure (*raso vai sa*), and on attaining this reservoir of ecstatic pleasure, who is the Supreme Godhead, even that one Brahman who embodies *brahmānanda* becomes submerged in sublime joy (*rasaṁ-hy eva-ayam labdhānandi bhavati*).

This statement clearly asserts that the Supreme Personality of Godhead is superior to everything, including Brahman. In this way, the One who has been defined as the reservoir of ecstatic pleasure, *rasa svarūpa*, is described in that crestjewel. and essence of all revealed scriptures *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* as Kṛṣṇa, son of Mahārāja Nanda, the embodiment of *rasa.* The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.43.17) states,

The wrestlers saw Lord Kṛṣṇa as a thunderbolt, the men of Mathura [saw Kṛṣṇa] as the best of males, the women [saw Kṛṣṇa] as Cupid in person.

This statement clarifies that the gradual development of spiritual joy depends entirely on *rasa* and the degree of its intimacy. Therefore *rasa* is the singular support of spiritual happiness and bliss.

The Supreme Lord Himself declares in the *Bhagavad-gītā* (14.27), "I am the basis of the impersonal Brahman...." The Supreme Lord describes Himself in this way to reveal His real position. Therefore the Vedic scriptures, both *śruti* and *smṛti,* point out that Kṛṣṇa, son of Mahārāja Nanda, is the Supreme Lord, eternally situated in pure goodness. He is the primeval Supreme Godhead who manifests Himself through His name, form, qualities, and pastimes, independent of any causes or conditions. Kṛṣṇa reveals Himself by His sweet will in such a way that the *jīvas* can experience Him with their senses, mind and intelligence.

The Lord and Suddha Bhakti—Self-manifest and Independent

Just as the Supreme Lord appears by His independent will as Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Yadu dynasty, or as Lord Ramacandra in the Raghu dynasty, so also by His sweet will He reveals Himself to the *jīvas*, who perceive Him by their senses. (This fact then determines that it is by the Supreme Lord's will and grace that the *jīvas* can attain God.) Like the Supreme Lord, the process of pure devotional service, belonging to the Lord's internal spiritual potency, also requires no cause or condition to manifest herself. As the Supreme Lord independently appears to the *jīvas* by His own sweet will, so Bhakti-devi is also self-manifest and fully independent, appearing in any place of her choice. (There is no difference between *śakti,* or energy, and the energetic principle; hence devotional service, or *Bhakti* is nondifferent from the Lord in all respects). Therefore *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.6) states,

The supreme occupation [dharma] for all humanity is that by which men can attain to loving devotional service unto the transcendent Lord.

Such devotional service must be unmotivated and uninterrupted to completely satisfy the self.

Loving devotion is described here as being without any motive for personal gain. This establishes that *bhakti* is unfettered by causes or conditions, The use of the term "uninterrupted" in this verse implies that nothing is more pleasing than *bhakti* Therefore Bhakti-devi cannot be hindered or interrupted; she is free to appear at will, and for the *jīvas* to perceive her with their senses.

How the Lord Bestows His Mercy and Pure Bhakti

In the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.20.8) it is stated:

yadṛcchayā mat-kathādau jāta-śraddhas tu yaḥ pumān
na nirviṇṇo nāti-sakto bhakti-yogo 'sya siddhi-daḥ

bhakti has been described by the word *yadṛcchayā,* or “own volition.” Again, in Śrīdhara Svāmī's commentary on this verse, he writes that *bhakti* is free to act at will. The dictionary meaning of the word *yadṛcchayā* is “spontaneous and independent”. Some persons interpret the meaning of *yadrcchayā* as “a sort of luck or fortune”. But when explained in this way there are bound to be apparent fallacies. For example, is this fortune because of pious activities? or misfortune because of impious acts? or simply a lack of good actions? If we accept that good fortune as a result of pious activities creates *bhakti* then it makes *bhakti* dependent upon, and subservient to, pious activities. In other words, this explanation infringes upon the principle of *bhakti's* free will.

If we agree to the other suggestion that lack of good fortune gives birth to *bhakti* then we admit that such fortunes are capricious, unpredictable, and therefore imperfect. How can the imperfect produce anything that is perfect? And if one says that the Supreme Lord' mercy is the ultimate cause of *bhakti* then one has to again undergo tedious research to pinpoint the cause of His mercy. It is certain that after much probing and speculation a single irrefutable cause will not be established. In following this line of thought, confusion reigns. On the other hand, if we agree that *bhakti* impregnates the devotee's heart as a result of Kṛṣṇa's causeless mercy, then understanding this become easier. Yet one may raise the question as to why the Lord's mercy often seen to be unequally dispensed. Is the Supreme Lord guilty partiality? If the Lord's grace is causeless then He must shower it everywhere without consideration, but it is seen that His mercy is not freely given to all. Should we blame Kṛṣṇa for being

biased, or even unfair? The open discrimination the Lord practices against the demons by killing them, and the favor he shows towards His devotee does not tarnish the Lord's reputation, but rather becomes an embellishment in His character. Kṛṣṇa's quality of *bhakta-vatsalya;* His protective affection towards the devotees, surpasses His other transcendental excellences. (The Eighth Chapter will deal with this point in detail.)

It is frequently pointed out that the pure devotee's mercy is also the cause of devotion. just as the Lord's mercy is known to be causeless, so His devotees who possess the same qualities as the Lord also shower their causeless mercy. Hence, when we declare that the devotee's causeless mercy is the reason which inspires *bhakti* but that *bhakti* is not being equally distributed, naturally this will be criticized as partiality. Though it is wrong to say that the causeless mercy of both the Lord and the pure devotee is prejudiced, we read in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.2.46),

The madhyam adhikārī offers his love to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, is a sincere friend to all the devotees of the Lord, shows mercy to ignorant people who are innocent and disregards those who are envious of the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

These characteristics clearly indicate that the *madhyam adhikārī* devotee does not distribute his mercy equally to everyone. The truth is that the Supreme Lord is subservient to His devotee's wishes; therefore He emulates His devotee in disbursing mercy. Based on this fact it is easy to see that if the *madhyam* devotee is merciful to someone the Lord automatically showers His mercy on that recipient This conclusion is sound in all respects.

The single cause that attracts the mercy of the Lord is the *bhakti* that permanently resides in the pure devotee's heart. In other words, Kṛṣṇa's mercy will not be invoked without that *bhakti* within the heart of His devotee which attracts His mercy to appear in the first place. Therefore, because *bhakti* is completely independent, even from previous piety and good fortune, it is undisputedly confirmed that *bhakti* is self-manifest. As mentioned earlier, devotion is the only cause of devotion; Bhakti-devi does not require any cause or reason to appear other than her own sweet will.

The Supreme Lord Is Subservient to His Pure Devotee

The word *ati-bhagya* (extreme good fortune) in the verse "*yaḥ kenāpyati-*

bhāgyena jātaśraddho'sya sevane" wherein it describes “one who engages in devotional service with firm faith due to some extreme good fortune", takes on a new and deeper meaning. It no longer means extreme good fortune as a result of previous pious activities, but extreme good fortune received owing to the pure devotee's compassion.

Here, one may present a counter argument saying that devotees are always under the Lord's control, therefore how can the devotee's mercy appear first, independently, and not as a successor to the Lord's causeless compassion? Kṛṣṇa Himself provides the solution to this problem by openly declaring that He is voluntarily subservient to His pure devotees. The Lord empowers His devotees to distribute mercy as they like, and in this way He broadcasts their superexcellent position.

The Lord Acts on His Own Sweet Will

When the devotees are experiencing the results of their past actions unfolding on the stage of this material world, the Supreme Lord retains full independent control over His mercy potency towards them. The Lord can utilize at will that mercy potency (*krpa-śakti*) He has entrusted to His devotees. In other words, the devotees do not have full liberty in distributing mercy.

Despite this fact, the Lord's kindness to His surrendered devotees is very clear. In the *Bhagavad-gītā*, the Lord says, *mat-prasādāt parāṁ śāntiṁ mat-saṁsthāmadhi-gacchati*. “My devotees obtain by My mercy alone the supreme peace that fully reposes in Me. “Here the word *prasāda* means the kindness the Lord shows to His devotees by entrusting them with His mercy potency. This was already mentioned earlier. Besides this, from the verse, “by the nature of His fully independent will", certain relevant points require elaboration.

One can understand from many scriptural evidences that the internal reason the Lord incarnates is simply because of His independent will. Yet the external reason the scriptures give for His appearance is to alleviate the burden of sin weighing down mother Earth. Similarly, no one commits a grievous mistake by saying that desireless activities—whereby one does not aspire to enjoy the fruits of action-are a means to approach bhakti, or devotional service. Again, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.12.9) explains:

yaṁ na yogena sāṅkhyena dāna-vrata-tapo-'dhvaraiḥ
vyākhyā-svādhyāya-sannyāsaiḥ prāpnuyād yatnavān api

Even though one engages with great endeavor in the mystic yoga system, philosophical speculation, charity, vows, penances, ritualistic sacrifices, teaching of Vedic mantras to others, personal study of the Vedas, or the renounced order of life, still one cannot achieve Me.
Here the scripture clarifies that all such practices cannot lead to bhakti. Elsewhere, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.47.24) declares:

dāna-vrata-tapo-homa japa-svādhyāya-saṁyamaiḥ
śreyobhir vividhaiś cānyaiḥ kṛṣṇe bhaktir hi sādhyate

Devotional service unto Lord Kṛṣṇa is attained by charity, strict vows, austerities and fire sacrifices, by japa, study of Vedic texts, observance of regulative principles and, indeed, by the performance of many other auspicious practices.
The type of *bhakti* attained by performing the activities mentioned in this verse refers to a devotion dominated by knowledge and on the mundane platform of the mode of goodness. It definitely does not refer to the unalloyed devotion that is transcendental to the material modes and on the plane of *prema,* or spontaneous love of Godhead.
Some scholars explain this verse by saying that charity means to give to Lord Viṣṇu and His devotees; fasting means to observe fasts like Ekādaśī, Janmastami; and renunciation and penances means to renounce sense gratification and accept a simple lifestyle to attain the lotus feet of Lord Kṛṣṇa. When these activities are thus explained they acquire the characteristics of *sadhana-bhakti*, or regulative devotional service. *Bhakti* is cultivated perfectly by the nine processes of devotional service, Therefore the scriptural declaration is that *bhakti* is the cause of *bhakti.* This philosophical presentation summarizes the different counter arguments and establishes the principle that *bhakti* is causeless.

Pure Bhakti Is the Only Means to Perfection

Bhakti is the only means to attain complete perfection. To abandon this path and accept voluntary hardships in pursuit of empirical knowledge is as futile as beating the empty husks of wheat. As the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.14.4) describes in the following verse, one gains nothing from it but useless toil.

śreyaḥ-sṛtiṁ bhaktim udasya te vibho
kliśyanti ye kevala-bodha-labdhaye
teṣām asau kleśala eva śiṣyate

nānyad yathā sthūla-tuṣāvaghātinām

My dear Lord, devotional service unto You is the best path for self-realization. If someone gives up that path and engages in the cultivation of speculative knowledge, he will simply undergo a troublesome process and will not achieve his desired result. As a person who beats an empty husk of wheat cannot get grain, one who simply speculates cannot achieve self-realization. His only gain is trouble.

The Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.5.17) states, *kovārtha āpto' bhajatāṁ svadharmataḥ*—that if a man gives up his occupational duties to serve the Supreme Lord, Hari, and in the process accidentally falls down before attaining perfection, then still there is no loss by his having abandoned his occupational duties. Again the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.14.5) describes that many *yogis* in the past tried to attain the Lord's lotus feet by their own endeavors; they offered the results of yogic practices the Lord and, because of it, became eligible to hear about transcendental glories. Hearing those transcendental topics an rendering devotional service made them self-realized, and thus achieved the supreme destination.

These scriptural evidences clearly indicate that for the *yogis, jñānīs,* and *karmis* to become successful in their individual paths, their engagement in devotional service is imperative. Whereas to attain perfection the path of *bhakti* which results in spontaneous love of Godhead *prema*, there is no need of *yoga, jñāna karma,* or any other process. The scripture *(SB.* 11.20.31) states that the cultivation of knowledge renunciation are not conducive to the path of *bhakti,* and that one who has left all other types of religion and is solely surrendered unto Kṛṣṇa is the best of all saintly souls. From these instructions we understand that there is no question of *bhakti* ever being dependent on anything extraneous. In fact, all other processes like *yoga, jñāna* and *karma* are able to offer the practitioner the desired results only with the help of *bhakti.* Thus Bhakti-devi, instead of being dependent on the other processes, in turn lends her potency to them so that these other processes are able to give the desired results. Bhakti-devi on her own can offer same results. Hence the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.20.32-33) states,

Everything that can be achieved by fruitive activities, penance, knowledge, detachment, mystic yoga charity, religious duties, and all other means of perfecting life is easily achieved by devotees through loving service to Me.

Besides, what is the use of acquiring such results without *bhakti?*

Therefore the *Hari-bhakti-sudhodaya* (3.11-12) declares:

bhagavad-bhakti-hīnasya jātiḥ śāstraṁ japas tapaḥ
aprāṇasyaiva dehasya maṇḍanaṁ loka-rañjanam

A person's noble birth, studying the Vedas, chanting mantras performing penances, and so on are an worthless if he is bereft of devotion, or bhakti, Just like the decorations of a dead body.

Pure Bhakti Is Independent Unlike Other Processes

As the proper functioning of the body is solely dependent on life being present in it, similarly, *yoga, jñāna, karma* and so on are subservient to and singularly dependent on, *bhakti*. Another fact is that *karma-yoga*, is effective only when the right conditions are present: the time, place, ingredients, performer, circumstances, and so on have to be auspicious and accurate. Mistakes in observing any of these regulations render fruitless all endeavor. (Detailed information about this is available in the *smṛti* scriptures dealing with karma-yoga.) None of these stipulations, however, govern the practice of *bhakti*. In order to clarify this point the *Viṣṇu-dharmottara* states:

na deśa-niyamas tatra na kāla-niyamas tathā
nocchiṣṭādau niṣedhaś ca śrī-harer nāmni lubdhakaḥ

O hunter! in the matter of chanting the holy name or executing other such processes of devotional service there are no hard and fast rules dependent on time, place, circumstance, etc. In fact, one can chant the holy names even in a contaminated state.

Bhakti is able to award absolute perfection without having to depend on anything. Again the *Padma Purāṇa* (the *Śrī Vyāsa Padyāvalyā*) declares:

sakṛd api parigītaṁ śraddhayā helayā vā
bhṛgu-vara nara-mātraṁ tārayet kṛṣṇa-nāma

O best of the Bhrgus! if anyone chants Lord Kṛṣṇa's name even once unreservedly, whether in a derisive mood or with proper faith, the holy name will certainly award him liberation.

If while executing *karma-yoga* a person commits the slightest mistake in observing its many rules and regulations it results in negative, inauspicious influences. Therefore the *smṛti* scripture warns that while peforming *yajna,* or sacrifice, if the Vedic *mantras* are chanted improperly,

or the intonations and pronunciations like *anudatta, udatta,* and *svarita* are faulty then these acquire the fearsome form of a thunderbolt that devastates the performer.
An example of the importance of following such stipulations found in the story of Vrtrasura, wherein Tvasta Rsi performed sacrifice to vanquish Indra. While chanting the *mantras* the *rsi* mispronounced the word *indra-satruh* Pronounced correctly the word means “enemy of Indra {Vrtrasura}", instead it came to mean “Indra, enemy of Vrtrasura”. This mistake proved fatal for Vrtrasura.

All Jīvas Have the Right of Admission into Bhakti-yoga

Similarly, in *jñāna-yoga,* or the cultivation of empirical knowledge, the conditions are that the, *jñāna-yogi* must purify his internal senses, namely: the mind, the intelligence, and the consciousness. In the case of *karma-yoga,* the *yogi* must relinquish the fruits by which his internal senses are purified. At this stage of practice he becomes eligible to embrace the path of *jñāna-yoga.* This proves that *jñāna-yoga* in some ways is dependent upon, and subservient to, *karma-yoga.* In *jñāna-yoga,* if the *jñānī* either accidentally or deliberately has the slightest falldown the scriptures (*SB* 7.15.36) condemn him as a shameless person, likening him to someone who eats his own vomit. Although such persons as Kamsa, Hiranyakasipu, and Ravana were very erudite and accomplished *jñāna-yogis,* yet they are infamous characters condemned throughout history for their moral aberrations. The slightest hint of profligacy penalizes the *jñāna-yogi* and his spiritual preceptors then ostracize him.
In the case of *bhakti-yogi; the* path of pure devotional service, even if the devotee is infected with lust, greed, and other such faults he is still eligible to take up the process. Later, by the practice of *bhakti,* which is completely independent and beyond all rules and regulations, the devotee's heart and consciousness become purified of any defects. Therefore, the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (10.33.39) explains:

vikrīḍitaṁ vraja-vadhūbhir idaṁ ca viṣṇoḥ
śraddhānvito 'nuśṛṇuyād atha varṇayed yaḥ
bhaktiṁ parāṁ bhagavati pratilabhya kāmaṁ
hṛd-rogam āśv apahinoty acireṇa dhīraḥ

Anyone who faithfully hears or describes the Lord's playful affairs with the young gopīs of Vṛndāvana will attain the Lord's pure devotional

service. Thus he will quickly become sober and conquer lust, the disease of the heart.

In this verse the Sanskrit for "attains pure devotional service is an infinitive verb and it is placed in the beginning of the verse. By doing so it means that, in spite of the person being afflicted with lust, he first attains *bhakti* and later roots out the material diseases.

The Bhakti-yogi Is Above Censure

In the *Bhagavad-gītā* (9.30) Lord Kṛṣṇa says,

Even if one commits the most abominable action, if he is engaged in devotional service he is to be considered saintly because he is properly situated in his determination.

The scriptures elsewhere (*SB* 11.14.18) also indicate that the Lord's devotees may come under the control of lust, greed, and so on.

From such authoritative statements we can conclude that despite character blemishes the scriptures do not censure such devotees. The appearance of the Viṣṇudutas, the messengers of Lord Viṣṇu, at the time of Ajamila's death proved that he was a devotee of the Lord. He had called out his son's name (Nārāyaṇa) with his last breath, simply out of affection for his child and thus chanted the Lord's name in *sanketa* (a hint-alluding to the Lord). Even though Ajamila did not consciously chant the holy name, according to the scriptures his unconscious chanting was a sufficient reason for such a devotee to be praised and accepted as saintly and to not be defamed.

For the *karma-yogi,* the essential key to success is the proper consideration of time, place, and circumstance. In *jñāna-yoga,* purification of the internal senses is the essential ingredient for progress. In both these processes the slightest deviation from the set rules neutralizes any success. *Jñāna-yoga* and *karma-yoga fully* depend on *bhakti* to help them achieve their respective goals; therefore *bhakti* is their resuscitator. Neither *karma-yoga* nor *jñāna-yoga* are independent-they are always inferior to *bhakti* because, unlike *bhakti, karma* and *jñāna-yoga* are regulated by stringent rules. To say that *jñāna* is the only means to execute *bhakti is* indeed foolish. The ultimate goal of life is *mukti,* or liberation, but *bhakti* takes one to. the highest spiritual realm.

The scriptures (*SB* 5.6.18) declare that the Lord easily grants one liberation, but rarely does He bless someone with *bhakti,* or devotion. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (6.14.5) confirms this:

muktānām api siddhānāṁ nārāyaṇa-parāyaṇaḥ
sudurlabhaḥ praśāntātmā koṭiṣv api mahā-mune

O great sages, among many millions who are liberated and perfect in knowledge of liberation, one may be a devotee of Lord Nārāyaṇa, or Kṛṣṇa. Such devotees, who are fully peaceful, are extremely rare.

Bhakti is the Ultimate

In His Vamana incamation the Supreme Personality of Godhead acted as Inda's junior Vamanadeva was the omnipotent Supreme Lord and the maintainer of India, and so the learned sages understood this as the Lord's kindness and not that His taking the inferior position was in any way demeaning. Similarly, when scriptural statements give more importance to *jñāna* and show *bhakti* as its appendage, this does not confound the wise. They understand that although *bhakti is* placed in a secondary position to *jñāna,* it is there to act as a support to *jñāna.* The scriptural adage *(SB.* 11.3.31) "*bhakti* gives rise to *bhakti"* proves that the ultimate goal of devotion is *prema* (spontaneous love of Godhead) - And *prema* is the pinnacle of all spiritual perfections. Bhakti-devi is the Supreme Lord's direct internal potency, and like the Lord she is omnipresent, supremely autocratic, subjugating everyone, the life-giving force, the highest principle, self-manifest. These are but a few of Bhakti-devi's unlimited qualities.
Perfection found by following any path other than the path of *bhakti-yoga* is limited, to say the least. It is clear that if a person chooses to embrace any of these other methods for spiritual elevation, we can understand that he has not read the authorized scriptures at all, or, if he has read them, that he has missed their essential teachings. The scriptures stress the point that only animals, who are inferior to human beings, do not worship and serve the Supreme Lord. This proves that those who are really on the human platform naturally must develop devotion to the Supreme Lord.

MK 2: The Second Shower of Nectar

The *Madhurya-Kadambini* eliminates the need to discuss dualism and

monism, but if a reader feels that such a discussion is necessary then he should read the *Aiśvarya-Kadambini,* also by Visvanatha, Cakravarti Ṭhākura.

Now we shall discuss *bhakti* and the symptoms of *bhakti*. There are two kinds of *bhakti: sraddha* (devotional service performed with faith) and *misra* (mixed devotional service). Pure devotional service, or *suddha-bhakti* is free from any traces of empirical knowledge or fruitive activity. Pure devotion is like a desire tree or creeper, eternal and unfettered by the concepts of the dualities of birth and death. Yet Bhakti-devi. appears on the sensual plane so that those who have embraced this path may perceive her. Those devotees who seek only the sublime nectar of spiritual life and who have denounced any desire outside of the service to the Supreme Lord, accept the shelter of the creeper of devotion.

Bhakti-devi is the inspiration for all activities favorable to the process of surrender to the Supreme Lord. Like the touchstone, Bhakti-devi gradually converts the iron of material sense perception to the gold of spiritual understanding merely by the power of her association.

The Two Types of Bhakti

From this creeper of devotion burgeons two fresh leaves both representing *sādhana bhakti* or regulated devotional service. The first leaf is called *klesaghni* (destroyer of distresses), and the second leaf is known as *subhada* (bestower of good fortune.) (These two leaves may also be described as *vaidhi-bhakti,* regulated devotional service, and *raga-bhakti* spontaneous devotional service. Their difference of mood depends entirely on the practitioner's level of realization). The soft inner core of these two leaves represents the devotee's mood of constant hankering for a loving relationship with the Lord and His eternal associates, When he attains this loving relationship, the devotee feels that he belongs to the beloved Lord and His associates. This elevated stage is known as *rāga-bhakti,* or spontaneous love.

The outer portion of the leaves represents the devotee's dutiful attitude towards Kṛṣṇa—his spontaneous feelings are curbed by scriptural edicts, his mood borders on formality, and lacks cozy familiarity, tenderness, and open expression of his intention and feelings. His relationship is on the platform of *vaidhi-bhakti* or regulated devotional service, and it is not as pure as a relationship in *raga-bhakti.* In actual fact, there is very little difference between these two stages of devotion as far as their ability to destroy distresses and bestow good fortune is concerned.

The Causes of Distress and the Means to Neutralize Them

Distress is caused by five things: nescience, false ego, material attachments, envy, and mundane engrossment, all of which essentially represent different aspects of the mode of ignorance. Sinful reactions, which are also part of *klesa* (distress), go through four stages:
prārabdha (already mature)
aprārabdha (not yet mature)
kuta (the stage before the seed)
bijam (the seed stage) .
Sins are abominable and they add only partly to man's material distress. The godly traits in man are his aversion towards the temporary, attraction for the divine that is connected to the Supreme, acceptance of that which is favorable to devotional service, mercy, forgiveness, truthfulness, simplicity, impartiality, patience, gravity, respectfulness, humility, and good fortune. The scriptures (*SB*. 5.18.12) also confirm that the Lord's devotees are automatically embellished with all the excellent qualities that are found in the demigods.
The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (11.2.42) declares, *bhaktiḥ pareśānubhavo viraktir anyatra caiṣa trika eka-kālaḥ,* that along with devotional surrender and direct perception of the Supreme Lord, aversion to, and detachment from, matter occur simultaneously. This supports the principles discussed earlier that *sadhana-bhakti* destroys distress and bestows good fortune. Now, although both these leaves of *sadhana-bhakti* sprout at the same time there is still a slight difference in their growth. The time lapse between distress being destroyed and good fortune being bestowed is so indistinct that the appearance of the two appear to happen simultaneously. Yet by the subtle symptoms of these two actions, the learned have been able to distinguish the difference.

Bhakti Begins with Faith

The pilgrim undertaking a journey on the path of devotion must have faith (*śraddhā*), a faith synonymous with the firm conviction to act on the words and the instructions of devotional scriptures. Faith is of two kinds: *svabhaviki* (natural) and *balotpadika* (inspired by an external force). Faith gives birth to the desire to surrender to a bona fide spiritual master and to learn from him the proper rules and etiquette of the devotional science. Sincerely following the spiritual master's instructions bestows upon a disciple the good fortune of wanting to associate with an elevated saint

experienced and absorbed in the same devotional mood as the disciple himself aspires for-min other words, a like-minded saintly instructor. At this point begins the stage of *bhajana-kriya*, the platform of serious devotional activities.

Bhajana-kriya

Bhajana kriya is divided into two parts *aniṣṭhitā* (unsteady) and *niṣṭhitā* (steady). When devotional activities are performed on the *aniṣṭhitā* platform, there is no fear of deviation or lethargy. *Aniṣṭhitā* (unsteady devotional service) is further divided into six gradations:
utsahamayi (sudden enthusiasm)
ghana-tarala (sometimes enthusiastic, sometimes lethargic)
vyudha- vikalpa (a stage when doubts assail one's resolve)
visaya-sangara (a stage of internal tug-of-war with material sense enjoyment)
niyamaksama (although one practises regularly, full justice is still not done to the process)
taranga-rangini (attachment to wealth, adoration, distinction, and so on).
Let us first discuss the beginning stage of *bhajana-kriya*—the stage of *utsahamayi*. When a young student begins higher education he is very proud, thinking himself to be a praiseworthy scholar. Such thoughts encourage the student to apply himself and to perform well. Similarly, when a novice commences spiritual life he takes to it so enthusiastically, thinking himself to be somebody special.
The example of the same young scholar explains the stage of *ghanataral*. At times the student concentrates deeply on his studies, but sometimes, because of his inability to understand something, he becomes apathetic. In devotional activities the neophyte goes through similar spells of opposing attitudes sometimes enthusiasm, other times lethargy.
Vyudha-vikalpa is an interesting stage on the path of spiritual life. sometimes the devotee thinks “I shall convince my wife and family to become Vaiṣṇavas and serve the Supreme Lord. I shall convert my house into a temple and remain there happily practicing devotional service.” At other times he thinks, “I shall leave my family, home, and the rest of my worries behind me and go to Vṛndāvana. I shall reside there, for it is the holiest of places, and I shall cultivate devotional surrender through the nine practices of devotion.” Or he will say, 'Ultimately, I have to give up my home and all my other attachments, then should I not first plunge into the pool of sensual pleasures until I am satisfied?”

Or he may think, The scriptures speak of family and wife being like a dark and dismal well. Should I not leave home this very moment? Sometimes the scriptures encourage me to perceive that this material life, family connections, wife, children are abominable and to renounce them. Yet how can I do that? My parents are old and infirm, who will take care of them? Besides, if I should leave home prematurely, with my material desires to enjoy still unfulfilled, my mind will continue to dwell on sense pleasures until my final days. This would be a disaster! Therefore, I can understand from my own thoughts that I am too weak to follow the Lord's instructions and renounce family life. For now I shall live simply. When the proper time comes I shall hasten to Vṛndāvana and spend my days and nights in deep meditation on the pastimes of the Supreme Lord."

The scriptures (*SB*. 11.20.31) say that neither knowledge nor renunciation is helpful in performing devotional service; since renunciation cannot give birth to *bhakti,* practicing renunciation separately is unnecessary. After one is situated in devotional service, however, renunciation is an asset because then renunciation proves not only the effectiveness of *bhakti* but also its superiority. it is both wrong and foolish to cultivate knowledge and renunciation separately once a person enters the path of devotional service.

A famous aphorism in logic is, "When the renunciate goes begging from door-to-door, he finds all the family larders full with grains because he is given charity." Basing his argument on this logic the aspiring devotee thinks, "I must take up renunciation". Next moment he comes across another scriptural maxim (*SB*.10.14.36) stating that unless one develops loving devotion to the Lord his home is a prison. So he says to himself, "Must I remain in household life and try to develop devotional surrender to the Lord? Maybe I should practice hearing about Kṛṣṇa or chanting Kṛṣṇa's name and fame. Should I emulate Ambarisa Mahārāja and simultaneously perform all the nine devotional activities?" When *bhajana-kriya* goes through this state of doubt and vacillating resolve it is known as *vyudha-vikalpa.*

Visaya-sangara is the stage when conflicting doubts and arguments are resolved in the devotee's heart and he is convinced about the path of renunciation. Scripture states that just as an object lost in the west cannot be found in the east, similarly, a person engrossed in materialistic activities will never become attached to Kṛṣṇa. The devotee feels that his desires for sensual enjoyment are forcing him towards fulfilling them, and so his attraction for chanting and devotional service becomes weak.

Therefore he thinks he should immediately discard those desires and wholeheartedly chant the holy name, although even in the process he may sometimes fall victim to sense gratification. The devotee still remains convinced of the scriptural truth that perfection can be achieved through devotional service. And although he may fall prey to sense enjoyment, he rebukes himself and feels remorseful, always continuing his devotional practices. Thus the devotee wages a war against his desire for sense gratification: sometimes the victor, sometimes the defeated. When he does fall victim, the devotee at this stage of unsteady devotional service still feels regret and revulsion at his weakness.

The next stage of unsteady devotional service is *niyamaksama,* where the devotee vows to increase his devotional activities. He resolves to chant sixty-four rounds daily, offer one hundred prostrated obeisances to the Deities and the Vaiṣṇavas; serve the senior devotees; avoid talking about mundane topics; shun the company of materialistic minded people, and so on. Daily he makes these vows, but at the last moment he is unable to honor them. The difference between *visayasangara* and *niyamaksama* is that in the former the devotee is helpless to give up material sense pleasures, and in the latter he is unable to increase and improve his devotional activities.

Now let us discuss *taranga-rangini* the last stage of *aniṣṭhitā* devotional service. In describing the nature of *bhakti* it is said that everyone is attracted towards the reservoir of *bhakti,* the devotee. The devotee himself becomes a treasure-house of good qualities and mercy. These characteristics attract people who, in turn, crown the devotee with wealth, adoration, distinction and position. Although these accolades come to him as by-products of *bhakti* they nevertheless may stunt the spontaneous growth of the creeper of devotion if he uses them for his self-aggrandizement. *Taranga* means “waves” and *rangini* means “play”. Therefore, in the vast unlimited ocean of *bhakti* these by-products are waves that create tempests in devotional life. The devotee aspiring for pure devotion sees these waves to be harmless,-only gleefully playing and cresting.

This chapter discusses *anartha-nivṛtti,* the cessation of unwanted desires. (*Anartha* means unwanted desires in the heart, and *nivṛtti* means to cease.) There are four kinds of *anartha:*
(1) Duskrtottha (*anarthas* coming from sinful activities)
(2) Sukrtottha (*anarthas* coming from pious deeds)
(3) Aparadhottha (*anarthas* coming from offences)
(4) Bhaktyuttha (*anarthas* coming from devotional service)
Earlier we discussed the bad effects of material attachments, such as envy and anger. These causes of distress are born of sinful activities *(duṣkṛti).* The craving for temporary sensual pleasure is also a detrimental desire in the heart, an *anartha* stemming from *sukṛti* (pious activities). [Suffering comes from impious deeds, whereas pious deeds facilitate enjoyment of the senses.] Some scholars say that *sukṛtottha anarthas* are part of the five causes of distress: envy, pride, anger, ignorance, and attachment.

Chanting—the Remedy for Offences

Obstructions on the path of pure devotion are caused by *aparādhottha anartha* (unwanted desires coming from offences). These offences refer particularly to *nāma-aparādhas,* or offences against the holy name, and they do not include *seva-aparādha,* offences committed in devotional service and in worship of the Deity. *Seva-aparādhas* are excluded because conscientious devotees remove such offences by reciting prayers and constantly performing devotional service, thereby avoiding the possibility of the offence in its seed form growing into a future reaction. Chanting the holy name of the Lord also effectively removes the reactions to *seva aparādha.* Therefore, if a devotee is careless in avoiding *seva-aparādha,* knowing that his chanting will nullify his reactions to such offences, then that is an offence against the holy name. The scriptures warn us that committing sins on the strength of chanting the holy name is a very serious *nāma-aparādha.*
Although chanting is shown here to be the remedy for curing *sevā-aparādha,* it is actually the remedy for offences committed in performing all parts of devotional service. The scriptures state that if a person sins knowing that later he can perform some atonement *(prāyaścitta)* to absolve them, the sins instead of being removed become even more serious.
In different scriptures, the Supreme Lord states that anyone who tries to serve Him, even unsuccessfully, need not be concerned, because the devotee's service, however imperfect, is never wasted. Again Kṛṣṇa has

said that anyone who simply chants a particular ten-syllable *mantra* [(*klīṁ*) *gopījana-vallabhāya svāhā*] attains all perfections.

Offences are not in the Category of Sins

Then one may ask whether it is a *nāma-aparādha* if a devotee cannot complete this discipline on the path of devotion. The reply is that it is not. Sinning on the strength of chanting means that one sins deliberately and thereby is guilty of *nāma-aparādha*. (Whereas sinful activities can be recognized as those actions strongly condemned in the scriptures, and whereby the scriptures give remedial measures to rectify them.) A person who is unable to reach his spiritual goal sometimes fails from carelessness, not necessarily from the compulsive habit of committing sins.

It is interesting to note that when a person does not attain the goal of *karma-yoga* the scriptures strongly condemn it, but when one fails to reach the goal of devotional service the scriptures do not react in the same way. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (*SB* 11.2.34-35) states:

ye vai bhagavatā proktā
upāyā hy ātma-labdhaye
añjaḥ puṁsām aviduṣāṁ
viddhi bhāgavatān hi tān
yān āsthāya naro rājan
na pramādyeta karhicit
dhāvan nimīlya vā netre
na skhalen na pated iha

The Lord's instructions to people in general who are ignorant about the ultimate goal of life regarding God realization is factually true religion and is also preached in the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam. Those on this path of perfection may run blindfolded but will never trip over and fall down to illusion.

Anyone who wholeheartedly takes up devotional service (*bhagavatat-dharma*) even with knowledge of its deep philosophy and its many practical aspects, may act contrary to the rules of one or some of its various practices much like the neophyte may. However, such a devotee still does not incur sin, nor is his advancement depreciated. In this case the word “blindfolded" cannot be interpreted to mean being blind or ignorant of the rules of the *śruti* and *smṛti* scriptures, otherwise this would obscure the principal purport of the text. The word “blindfolded" does not mean that one should ignore the thirty-two offences in devotional service just because the Lord said that “one may run blindfolded but will never ... fall down to illusion. (Two examples of these

thirty-two offences *[seva aparādha]* to avoid are that one cannot enter the temple with shoes on or whilst one is riding on a palanquin. Both of these are offences prohibiting certain actions.)

How to Absolve Offences

A person who offends the Supreme Lord is referred to as a two-legged animal. It is mentioned that offences committed against the holy name may be old offences or new ones; if either of the offences are done unwittingly then certain symptoms will surely reveal as much. Constant chanting of the holy name will lead to unflinching faith in devotional service. This constant chanting gradually diminishes the effects of the offences. But if the offences were committed knowingly, right from the start, then special arrangements for counteracting them are recommended.

Blaspheming a Saintly Person Is Deadly

Now we shall discuss the ten offences against the holy name: The first offence is to criticize and blaspheme the devotees. Blaspheming in this context means to be envious of, and antagonistic towards, the saintly devotee. If one even accidentally commits this offence against a Vaiṣṇava he must bitterly repent of his low behavior. just as poison is counteracted by poison, similarly, the offender, having set aflame his spiritual life with blasphemy, must be purified in the fire of contrition. The offender must go and fall at the feet of the devotee he reviled and beg forgiveness until he is again able to please that Vaiṣṇava. He Must approach the devotee with trepidation in his heart and think that by pleading, praising, offering repeated obeisances, or by any means he must satisfy the offended devotee. Yet, if for some reason he is unable to appease the devotee then the offender must continue to serve him for many days in a way that will impress and satisfy him, In case the offence is of such a serious nature that the Vaiṣṇava's ire remains unpacified, then the offender must strongly condemn his own abominable action and think, “Oh, how shameful! I have blasphemed a Vaiṣṇava' I shall have to suffer millions of years in the fire of hell.” With a heavy heart, the *aparadhi* must then take complete shelter of the holy name and chant incessantly, knowing this to be his only hope.

The holy name of Kṛṣṇa is all-powerful and can absolve any offence, however serious. The offender may incorrectly think, “If this is true about chanting, their why should I have to fall at the Vaiṣṇava's feet in such a

humble manner and demean myself? After all the scriptures ensure that for one who commits *nāma-aparādha* chanting on its own will clear away all offences, hence I shall certainly be again pardoned." Such thinking is incorrect. Instead, the offender becomes enmeshed in another heinous *nāma-aparādha,* that of committing sin on the strength of chanting the holy name.

The offender may once again try to rationalize his misbehavior by saying, "According to the scriptures (*SB* 11.11.29) only those who are compassionate, peaceful, and tolerant are called *sādhus,* or saintly persons. Therefore, the offence of blaspheming a devotee is appropriate only when someone who possesses these characteristics is criticized, not for one who has not developed these qualities. In reply, the scriptures state that even if reprobates, cheaters, hypocrites, pretenders, outcastes, and worse take up devotional service, needless to say they are still considered to be *sadhus*. They must not be criticized for their past, however terrible it may have been, and they cannot be barred from being accepted as Vaiṣṇava devotees. nor can their devotion be deprecated.

The *sastra* further declares that if a *mahā-bhagavata,* or an elevated pure devotee, is offended, he simply brushes aside the entire episode because he possesses immense compassion, and he will not acknowledge the behavior as an offence. As for the guilty party, he must fall at the *sadhu's* feet and beg forgiveness so that his heart may be purified. We learn from the *sastra* and the *sadhus* that even if the *maha-bhagavata.* effortlessly tolerates the foolish person's blasphemy, his followers cannot bear this atrocity; they punish the offender by wishing him to suffer appropriately for his offence.

The pure devotees are incorruptible and independent in thought. They do not require a reason to shower their causeless mercy on any soul, however wretched he may be. Sometimes they display great magnanimity by showing profound mercy to a downright offender and harsh critic. At the same time they are not swayed by praise in order to make them act compassionately. The story of the elevated devotee Jada Bharat is a good example. King Rahugana once engaged Jada Bharat to carry his palanquin. After going some way, the king began to rudely criticize Jada Bharata who simply showered him with mercy. In another incident, the atheistic Daityas were very offensive to Uparicara Vasu, the King of Cedi. A third example is that of the despicable Madhai who threw a stone at Lord Nityananda, causing His forehead to bleed profusely, yet the Lord showed him causeless mercy. So far we have discussed the first *nāma-aparādha*,

that of offending a devotee. The same principle is applied to another offence against the holy name that of disobeying the orders of the spiritual master.

Differences Between Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Siva

We now continue our discussion by explaining the differences between Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Siva. Consciousness is of two kinds: independent consciousness and dependent consciousness. Supreme Consciousness, or the Supreme Controller, is all-pervasive and fully independent. The subordinate consciousness is present in the body in the form of *jīva* energy. This consciousness is the living entity who is always under the control of the Supreme Consciousness.

The Supreme Consciousness is further divided into two classes: (a) that which is beyond the illusory potency, *maya's* jurisdiction, and (b) that which voluntarily accepts the influence of *maya* for executing universal affairs Lord Nārāyaṇa belongs to the first category. The scriptures (*SB* 10.88.5) have often described Lord Nārāyaṇa as the Supreme Being who is transcendental to the material modes. Lord Siva belongs to the second category of Supreme Consciousness. The scriptures describe Lord Siva as eternal, possessing divine energies, and all the three *lingas* (the three levels of *śakti: svarūpa, maya, and jīva saktis)*. And although he is covered by the material modes Siva is not in the category of *jīva*, The *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.45) states:

kṣīraṁ yathā dadhi vikāra-viśeṣa-yogāt
sañjāyate na hi tataḥ pṛthag asti hetoḥ
yaḥ śambhutām api tathā samupaiti kāryād
govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi

Just as milk is transformed into curd by the action of acids, but yet the effect curd is neither same as, nor different from, its cause, viz., milk, so I adore the primeval Lord Govinda of whom the state of Sambhu is a transformation for the performance of the work of destruction.

In the other *Purāṇas* and *Agamas*, Lord Siva's supreme status has been unequivocally declared. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.23) states that Lord Hari alone is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, the sole purpose of creation, maintenance, and annihilation of this universe. He enters into the three material modes of goodness, passion, and ignorance, and then expands as Lord Siva, Lord Brahma, and Lord Viṣṇu, respectively, to carry

out such work as the creation. This statement confirms that Lord Brahma is the Supreme Controller, although at the same time it must be understood that this is so because he has been empowered by the Supreme Lord, Viṣṇu. The *Brahma-saṁhitā* (5.49) confirms this:

bhāsvān yathāśma-śakaleṣu nijeṣu tejaḥ
svīyaṁ kiyat prakaṭayaty api tadvad atra
brahmā ya eṣa jagad-aṇḍa-vidhāna-kartā
govindam ādi-puruṣaṁ tam ahaṁ bhajāmi

I adore the primeval Lord Govinda from whom the separated subjective portion Brahma receives his power for the regulation of the mundane world, just as the sun manifests some portion of his own light in all the effulgent gems that bear the names of sūrya-kānta, etc.

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.24) explains that smoke is more subtle than inert wood and fire is superior to smoke because it receives the oblations in Vedic sacrifices. Similarly, the material mode of passion is higher than ignorance, and goodness is higher than passion because it reveals Brahman. Although the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* places the mode of passion above ignorance, smoke, here symbolic of the mode of passion, is unable to bring one to the stage of God-realization. Direct perception of the Supreme Lord is possible only in the stage of *sattva guna*, symbolized by the fully ignited sacrificial fire.

Of course, God-realization is latent within *tamah guna*, just as fire is latent in firewood. *Tamah guna* a state of deep slumber: one experiences a feeling of undifferentiated euphoria similar to that experienced by the monists in search of knowledge. The final destination of the monists is the state of undifferentiated bliss known as *suṣupti*, or deep slumber. One must be in a position to analyze aphorisms from the scriptures and draw the right conclusions to avoid confusion.

The Jīva

Now we shall discuss the *jīva,* the other conscious being. The *jīva's* position is that of eternal loving servitorship to the Supreme Personality of Godhead. *jīva* is of two categories, the first category being those under the spell of illusion and nescience. Demigods, humans, animals, and lesser beings are in the first category of *jīvas.* The second kind, those who are free from nescience and illusion, are subdivided into two sections: Those who are absorbed in the opulence of the Supreme Lord and

worship Him reverentially
Those who are neither attracted to the Lord's opulence nor to this mood of reverential worship.
The *jīvas* who are absorbed in the Lord's opulence are again divided into two kinds:
(a) Those who appear directly from the state of pure consciousness and are saturated in the absolute truth. (The four Kumaras are a good example of this category.)
(b) Those who appear as a result of the action of the illusory potency and are covered by the awe-inspiring aspect of the cosmic creation. (Lord Brahma is the best example of this second category.)
The *jīvas* who are unattracted to the opulence of the Lord are also further divided:
(i) those who cultivate *jñāna* (speculative knowledge) and desire to merge with the Supreme Lord
ii) those who mechanically perform devotional activities *(sadhanabhakti)* but who have no desire to merge with the Lord.
Those who desire to become one with the Lord are in a dangerous and suicidal situation, whereas those who perform devotional activities mechanically are not in such a precarious position, because they are able to relish a sweet and more intimate relationship with the Supreme Lord.
Because both Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Siva (Sadasiva) embody the same Supreme Consciousness they are nondifferent. However, both Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Siva (Sadasiva) reside simultaneously on dual planes of *nirguna* (transcendence), and *saguna* (material nature). The unmotivated and transcendental devotees worship only the *nirguna* Supreme Consciousness, while the *sakama* fruitive workers can worship simply the *saguna* aspect of the Supreme Consciousness. This shows the inherent distinction between Lord Viṣṇu, Lord Siva, Lord Brahma, and the *jīvas.*
It is important to note that many *Purāṇas* propound the theory of Lord Viṣṇu and Lord Brahma being one. The analogy of the sun and the precious gem *suryakanta mani,* will help as to understand this oneness. In a sense, the sun and the reflected glory of the sun in the gem are the same. In some *mahakalpas,* or millenniums, the Supreme Lord empowers certain *jīvas* to take up the position of Lord Siva or Lord Brahma. just as the jewel is dependent on the sun for its glory, Lord Brahma and Lord Siva are dependent on the Supreme Lord for theirs. This point has been confirmed in the *Hari-bhakti-vilasa* (1.73):

yas tu nārāyaṇaṁ devaṁ brahma-rudrādi-daivataiḥ
samatvenaiva vīkṣeta sa pāṣaṇḍī bhaved dhruvam

The scriptures also state that if a person, after considering all these facts, adamantly equates Lord Viṣṇu with demigods like Lord Brahma, Lord Siva, and so on he is condemned as an atheist and an offender. The basis of this scriptural injunction lies in the fact that while Lord Brahma is generally an empowered *jīva*, Lord Siva at times is also an empowered jīva. Persons who have not researched deeply 'into this subject matter end up forming their own speculative ideas. They make such comments as, "Lord Viṣṇu is God and not Lord Śiva", or "Lord Siva is the Supreme, not Lord Viṣṇu." They continue to say, 'We are undeviating devotees of Lord Viṣṇu; we do not care for Lord Śiva", and vice versa. Hence their inclination to polemics leads them to commit offences. Now, the only way they can mitigate their offences is to meet a devotee well-versed in this topic who is willing to instruct them properly. The confused can become enlightened about everyone's real position, including in which way Lord Siva and Lord Viṣṇu are qualitatively nondifferent. Such persons begin to repent of having committed such offences and sincerely take up chanting the Lord's holy name. In fact, it is this chanting that finally exonerates such people from their offence.

Some say that these sections of the *Vedas* do not carry the slightest mention about the science of devotional service, so they are fit to be praised and appreciated only by mundane scholars. Those who lash out with such caustic criticism against those parts of the *Vedas* that propound the process of empirical knowledge and fruitive action will have to appease, with reconciliatory praises, those who follow such sections. Additionally, the offenders must chant the holy. name to absolve the fourth *nāma-aparādha:* blaspheming the Vedic scriptures and its corollaries.

One may ask why not indeed criticize those section emphasize empirical knowledge and fruitive action. The answer is because the scriptures are most merciful. By some unexpected good fortune if an offensive person meets a devotee who is knowledgeable about the *Vedas,* he will receive proper instructions on Vedic understanding. If the offender sincerely understands these instructions then he will truly appreciate the *Vedas.* Out of compassion for persons who are unfit for devotional service, who are duplicitous in action, and totally absorbed in mundane matters, the

Vedas inspire them to become resolute in following its divine edicts, thus helping to uplift them. The *Vedas* benevolently draw these erring souls away from the *pravrtti-marg* (the path of worldly-mindedness) and towards *nivrttt-marg* ,(the path of detachment). Without having the realization that the *Vedas* are benevolent, and without possessing a deferential mood towards the *śruti,* one's offences cannot be mitigated. Thus we have discussed the prime cause of offences as well as how to absolve them.

Five Steps to Revoke Anarthas

Now we shall talk further on the *anarthas* (unwanted desires) that crop up in the execution of devotional service. Unwanted desires tend to smother the natural growth of the creeper of *bhakti*. At first glance unwanted desires look like off-shoots from the *bhakti-lata* (the creeper of devotion), but in reality they are mundane desires for position, adoration, and opulence. They color and taint the practitioner's consciousness. Thriving in this way these *anarthas* arrest the growth of the creeper of devotional service.
The four *anarthas* mentioned in the beginning of this chapter can be mitigated in the five following ways:

i) eka-deśavarttinī (partially);
ii) bahu-deśavarttinī (substantially);
iii) prayiki (almost completely);
iv) pūrṇā (completely);
v) ātyāntikī (absolutely thoroughly).

The many *anarthas* stemming from *aparādhas* are partially destroyed in the final stages of *bhajana-kriya* (rendering devotional service under the guidance of a spiritual master). This is known as *eka-deśavarttinī*. When *bhajana-kriya* gains maturity it turns to *niṣṭhā,* or steadiness, in devotional activities. In this stage of development the mitigation of *anarthas* is substantial *(bahu-deśavarttinī);* thereafter, on the platform of *rati* (attraction) the unwanted desires in the heart are almost completely absolved *(prayiki)*. With the first awakening of *prema*, or divine love, these *anarthas* are completely removed (*purna*). Finally, the *anarthas* are totally uprooted *(ātyāntikī)* when the devotee receives the mercy and shelter of the Lord's lotus feet.

Examples of Offences Cited from the Scriptures

At this point, one may ask, “How could Citraketu be guilty of offending Lord Siva, despite having attained a direct interview with the Supreme Lord?” King Citraketu's offence against Lord Siva is an allegorical offence, not a perceived offence, because even after the king was cursed he did not forfeit his spiritual wealth of *prema.* This proves that curses do not take proper effect on such elevated souls. What is of the utmost significance is that subsequently King Citraketu became an eternal associate of the Supreme Lord.

Another incident from the *Bhāgavatam* is that of Jaya and Vijaya offending the four Kumaras. The scriptures say the reason for their deliberately offensive action was because their love for the Lord (*prema*) prompted it. In fact, Jaya and Vijaya had prayed to the Lord for such a situation:

My dear Lord Nārāyaṇa! O master of the demigods! We have reasons to believe You desire to fight. But we do not see anyone fit to engage You in combat. Although we are strong, we are not inimical to You. Therefore somehow You must arrange a situation whereby we become Your opponents and You can satisfy Your chivalrous mood by fighting with us. We cannot tolerate to see you even slightly deprived of anything since You are eternally the complete whole, fully self-satisfied. We are Your humble servants. Therefore as You are bhakta vatsala kindly grant our prayers even if we fall far short of Your expectations of the level of devotional qualities.

If one mentally commits offences by misunderstanding the status of such devotees, then he must overcome such *aparādhas* by proper scriptural judgement.

Now let us discuss the *anarthas* arising from impious activities, or *duskrtottha.* These *anarthas* are almost eradicated *(prayiki)* in the *bhajana-kriya* stage of devotional service, completely absolved *(purna)* in the developmental stage of *niṣṭhā* (steady faith in devotional service), and destroyed absolutely without a trace *(ātyāntikī)* in the stage of *āsakti,* or unwavering attachment to devotional service.

Anarthas stemming from *bhakti* are absolved in the following manner: *eka-deśavarttinī* (partially) in the *bhajana-kriya* stage; *purna* (completely) in the *niṣṭhā* stage; and *atyantika* (absolutely thoroughly) in the *ruci* stage (relishing devotional service).

This is the conclusion of the holy sages after their considerable

deliberation on this topic. A famous axiom states that as the sun, upon rising, dissipates the darkness of night, similarly the holy name of God, when once heard or chanted, destroys all the sins a person can commit. There is much evidence in the scriptures (*SB* 6.16.44) supporting this aphorism, such as that even a *caṇḍāla* (dog-eater) becomes liberated simply by once hearing or chanting the Supreme Lord's holy name. We learn from the story of Ajamila in the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* that the holy name chanted even once in the *namabhasa* stage (shadow of the holy name) can eradicate all *anarthas,* even that of *avidya* (nescience), and is capable of elevating one to the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord.
It could be said that the method for removing the *anarthas* listed in the previous paragraphs is perhaps imbalanced. There is no doubt about the unlimited potency and capacity of the holy name, but the holy name, being displeased with offenders, withdraws His potencies and does not manifest Himself to them. Thus we can understand that this is the reason why all sorts of *anarthas,* offences, and sins are present in a person. Despite the presence of such obstacles, the Yamadutas (the servants of the god of death) are ineffectual against those who chant the holy name even with offences. The scriptures (*SB* 6.1.19) confirm that those fortunate persons who are chanting the holy name need never set eyes on Yamaraja (the god of death) or his fearsome messengers, even during a dream.

Chanting Without Offence Brings Prema

Elsewhere, the scriptures describe that such an offender cannot be purified by the eight-fold *yoga* process. This point is explained by the example of a wealthy landlord who, although capable of looking after his needy relatives, does not do so, because they are inimical towards him. Naturally, this neglect exacerbates their unhappy state. This means, of course, that the landlord would never be generous to strangers seeing that he even neglects his own family. This aptly describes the topic discussed in the previous paragraphs. However, if the inimical relatives change their attitude, understanding the inner feelings of the wealthy landlord and endeavoring to please him, then they are gradually helping to mitigate their own distress. Similarly, if a person sincerely serves the Vaiṣṇavas, the guru, and the scriptures he invokes the mercy of the holy name, who in turn exonerates him from sins. It is unacceptable if anyone claims that he does not commit any of the offences against the holy name, because everything is easily judged by its results, whether of recent or past actions. One may continually chant the holy name for a long time, but if the signs

of love of God do not manifest then we can understand that this is because of' *nāma-aparādha,* or offences against the holy name. The following verse from the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (2.3.24) explains:

tad aśma-sāraṁ hṛdayaṁ batedaṁ
yad gṛhyamāṇair hari-nāma-dheyaiḥ
na vikriyetātha yadā vikāro
netre jalaṁ gātra-ruheṣu harṣaḥ

Certainly the heart is steel framed which, in spite of one's chanting the holy name of the Lord with concentration, does not change when ecstasy takes place, tears fill the eyes and the hairs stands on end.

The following quote from the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* further states:

ke te'parādhā vipendra namno bhagavataḥ krtāḥ
vinighnanti nṛṇāṁ kṛtyaṁ prākṛtaṁ hyānayanti hi

O best of the brahmanas, offences against the holy name result in a person losing all piety and for him the mundane manifests in transcendental objects.

What is the destructive nature of these offences against the holy name? Hearing and chanting the Lord's holy name, qualities, and so on bestows *prema*; visiting places of pilgrimage connected with the Lord's pastimes rewards one with perfection; and regularly honoring the Lord's *prasadam* subdues the senses, yet *nāma-aparādha* is so devastating that, although transcendental and completely spiritual, these activities appear mundane. How serious are these offences that can cause such a phenomenon!

What are those offences? This question expresses deep astonishment. One may say that the offender against the holy name is condemned to develop aversion to God, making it impossible for him to remain firmly fixed in devotional service under the guidance of his guru. This is certainly true. It is also true that just as a very sick patient loses his appetite, a grievous offender to the holy name loses his attachment for hearing, chanting, and other devotional activities. However, just as the patient's sickness abates after some time, his appetite gradually returning, so also, when the offender's sensual cravings decrease after a long period of sense enjoyment, his interest in devotional service is rekindled.

The conclusion is that the offender again becomes eligible to render devotional service. To continue the analogy, a nourishing and healthy diet of milk cannot fully revitalize a seriously diseased man. It helps him

slightly but does not kill the germs and bacteria. By proper medicines and diet, however, the patient is gradually able to regain good health. In this way, after again becoming eligible to perform devotional service, the devotee eventually manifests devotional symptoms such as sincere hearing, chanting, and serving. In other words, the different stages of devotion listed in the scriptures such as *śraddhā, sadhu-sanga, bhajana-kriya, anartha-nivṛtti, niṣṭhā*—step-by-step they all form a foolproof method of advancement. (*Anartha-nivṛtti* removes both *prārabdha* and *aprārabdha anarthas*.)

When some people do not see ecstatic symptoms manifest in those devotees fully engaged in hearing and chanting, when they see that these devotees are also inclined towards sinful activities, they often imagine *aparādhas*. Not only that, but when they see devotees suffering everyday distress such persons assume that devotees are not free from *prārabdha* sins.

The Ajamila story helps to clarify the matter. The events in Ajamila's life: his immoral association with a prostitute, his son's receiving the name Nārāyaṇa, the affection he felt when calling his son by name many times in a day, his being judged innocent of offence by the Viṣṇuduttas—all constitute reactions from *prārabdha* sins. However, in the case of Yudhisthira Mahārāja, although free from the reactions of *prārabdha* sin, he still had to suffer many harrowing adversities.

Surrendered Devotees are Under the Lord's Protection

The philosophical conclusion to this is deftly explained by the analogy of a fruit-bearing tree that bears fruit only after a certain period of time, not just at any time, nor immediately upon being planted. Similarly, a devotee blessed by the holy name because of his devotion, is showered with the mercy of the name, all in the proper time. As for the sinful reactions the devotee suffers because of his previous impiety, they are compared to the striking of a fangless snake—inconsequential. Therefore his sorrows, reversals, retributions, and diseases are not a consequence of *prārabdha* sins. The Supreme Lord has declared: (*SB*. 10.88.8)

śrī-bhagavān uvāca
yasyāham anugṛhṇāmi
hariṣye tad-dhanaṁ śanaiḥ
tato 'dhanaṁ tyajanty asya
svajanā duḥkha-duḥkhitam

The person who is blessed by Me, I gradually take away his wealth. His friends and relatives drift away from him because of his poverty and suffering.
In another place the Lord says:

nirdhanatva-mahārogo mad anugraha-lakṣaṇam

The awesome affliction known as poverty is in fact a sign of mercy.
The truth is that the Supreme Lord, the greatest benefactor of His devotees, purposely inflicts suffering on His devotees just to increase their humility and yearning for Him. Thus the devotee's woes are not because of fruitive reactions nor are they reactions of *prārabdha* sins.

MK 4: The Fourth Shower of Nectar

In the Second Shower of Nectar, we discussed the two types of *bhajana-kriya:* steady *(niṣṭhitā)* and unsteady *(aniṣṭhā)*. Unsteady *bhajana-kriya* was further divided into six sections, but little was discussed about *bhajana-kriya bhakti* performed on the steady, or *niṣṭhitā,* platform. *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.17-18) explains the reason for following this particular sequence in the following verses:

śṛṇvatāṁ sva-kathāḥ kṛṣṇaḥ
puṇya-śravaṇa-kīrtanaḥ
hṛdy antaḥ-stho hy abhadrāṇi
vidhunoti suhṛt satām

Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Personality of Godhead, who is the Paramatma [Supersoul] in everyone's heart and the benefactor of the truthful devotee, cleanses desire for material enjoyment from the heart of the devotee who has developed the urge to hear His messages, which are in themselves virtuous when properly heard and chanted.

naṣṭa-prāyeṣv abhadreṣu
nityaṁ bhāgavata-sevayā
bhagavaty uttama-śloke
bhaktir bhavati naiṣṭhikī

By regular attendance in classes on the Bhāgavatam and by rendering of

service to the pure devotee, all that is troublesome to the heart is almost completely destroyed, and loving service unto the Personality of Godhead, who is praised with transcendental songs, is established as an irrevocable fact.

The Supreme Lord is the greatest benefactor of the pure devotees, the saintly *sadhus*. Therefore the only way to receive the Lord's mercy is to first receive the grace of the pure devotees. The first verse quoted previously describes the unsteady *bhajana-kriya* stage of devotional service. The second verse (1.2.18) describes *naisthiki-bhakti,* or steady devotional service, also known as the *niṣṭhā* stage. In describing the two stages of *bhakti* both the verses mention destroying inauspicious things in the heart, of purifying the heart of unwanted material desires. The second verse quoted suites that impurities are almost completely destroyed, meaning that some residue of impurity is still there in the heart.

Five Obstacles to the Process of Anartha-nivṛtti

Now, according to the proper order, *nisthiti-bhakti* will be explained. Devotion that possesses *niṣṭhā* (firm commitment and undeviating faith) is known as *niṣṭhitā-bhakti*. At the stage when *anarthas* still persist in the heart the devotee may try as hard as possible to counteract them by devotional activities, yet the five internal obstacles, *laya, viksepa, apratipatti, kasaya,* and *rasasvada,* undermine his attempts to reach steadiness in devotion. Once the *anarthas* are removed, then these five obstacles are almost abolished and devotion becomes firm and undeviating. Therefore it can be said that the absence of these five impediments in the heart are symptoms of *niṣṭhitā-bhakti*.

The five obstacles are defined in the following way:

Laya is the weakness of being more soporific during hearing about the Lord than while chanting His names, and more soporific while remembering Lord Hari than during hearing about Him.

Viksepa is talking or thinking about mundane nonsense during devotional activities such as hearing or chanting.

Apratipatti is when both *laya* and *viksepa* are absent, but at times one still feels incapable of, or disinterested in, hearing, chanting, and so on.

Kasaya is defined as the tendency to display such faults as anger, greed, and arrogance during devotional activities.

Rasāsvāda means that the mind is so attached to sense pleasure, often meditating on it, that he is unable to hear and chant with concentration.

With the removal of these obstacles, the devotee makes progress towards

niṣṭhā, or steady devotion. When *naistha-bhakti* blossoms in the devotee's consciousness, the immediate effect is that he is no longer ruled by anger, greed, or any other influences from the modes of passion and ignorance. The *naisthiki bhakta* becomes firmly fixed on the Supreme Lord, who is always situated in pure goodness, and experiences divine bliss. The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.2.19) confirms this:

tadā rajas-tamo-bhāvāḥ
kāma-lobhādayaś ca ye
ceta etair anāviddhaṁ
sthitaṁ sattve prasīdati

As soon as irrevocable loving service is established in the heat the effects of nature's modes of passion and ignorance, such as lust, desire and hankering, disappear from the heart. Then the devotee is established in goodness, and he becomes completely happy.
In this verse, the Sanskrit word *ca* ("and") conveys the presence of passion and ignorance in the heart of the devotee. But in the same verse the expression *ceta etair anaviddham* (that the mind is unaffected by these) establishes that these material modes are not obstacles on the path of devotion, but reside in the heart in a neutral state until the devotee on the platform of steady devotional service attains *bhava. (Bhava is* the stage of spontaneous loving devotion to the Lord.)

The Two Types of Fixed Faith

Niṣṭhā (fixed faith) has two varieties: (1) *saksat bhakti-visayini* or nourishing spontaneous *bhakti,* and *(2) vastu-visayini,* or the fostering of complementary *bhakti* qualities. *Saksat-bhakti* has many variations that can be broadly categorized into three divisions:

i) kāyiki (physical)
ii) vāciki (oral)
iii) manasiki (mental).

Some say that there is a definite order of development in these three divisions of *saksat-bhakti.* The devotee first cultivates spontaneous *bhakti* with *kayiki,* followed by *vaciki* and *manasiki* respectively. The opposing group, however, contends that there is no such successive order. Be as it may, qualities like enthusiasm, firm conviction, and unremitting energy are found in varying degrees in devotees. Because some devotees are not

inclined to express such qualities in their actions, this gives the impression to others that they are not singleminded in their devotion to the Supreme Lord.

The idea that these different stages of *niṣṭhā-bhakti* have an order of sequence as mentioned earlier is thus thrown off-balance. Consequently it lends weight to the idea that the different types of *saksat-bhakti* do not follow in order. Furthermore, qualities such as humility, which specifically means renouncing respect given to the self by others but still offering respect to others, friendliness, and compassion are conducive to the culture of devotional service. Sometimes it appears that certain devotees who are self-controlled and equipoised possess these qualities, although they lack *bhakti-niṣṭhā,* or unwavering faith in devotional service. Conversely, in other cases, an arrogant and therefore disrespectful devotee does not seem to be decorated with these good qualities although he does, in fact, possess *bhakti-niṣṭhā.* In fact, the presence of these qualities clearly indicates undeviating faith in *bhakti,* and the absence of these qualities such as friendliness and compassion means lack of faith in the process of *bhakti.* This is obvious to most people.

The *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* declares that with the appearance *of naisthiki-bhakti* the devotee's consciousness is unaffected by the material modes of passion and ignorance. His consciousness, thus purified of evil traits like lust, then becomes fixed in the mode of goodness and the devotee experiences divine happiness. The essential yardstick for measuring perfectly the depth of *niṣṭhitā-bhakti,* or the lack of it *(aniṣṭhitā-bhakti*), is whether hearing and chanting has intensified or has stagnated. An increase of hearing and chanting thus indicates a rise in *niṣṭhitā-bhakti,* while any decrease implies the presence of *aniṣṭhitā-bhakti.*

MK 5: The Fifth Shower of Nectar

The golden jewel of *bhakti* becomes when warmed in the fire of *abhyasa* , repeated devotional service, and this *abhyasa* conceives the taste for *bhakti* in the heart. *Ruci* is defined as the taste or attraction that first helped the devotee to relish the process of hearing, and now *ruci* assists the devotee in the process of chanting. As the devotee's taste increases, the repetition of hearing and chanting seems not in the least exacting. Thereafter, *ruci*

soon transforms into strong attachment for hearing and chanting. The devotee feels that any activities outside Kṛṣṇa conscious ones are a waste of energy. For example, a young *brahmana* student has to study the scriptures daily by rote. Gradually he begins to understand the import of the scriptures; this creates fresh interest for him and his studies are no longer a burden.

Another example of the effect *ruci* has on one's devotional life is that of the man suffering from jaundice. The jaundiced patient finds the sweetness of sugarcandy unpalatable, but he is ignorant of the fact that sugarcandy can cure his disease, as a more well-informed person would know. By constantly eating sugarcandy the patient recovers his normal taste; he begins to relish the sweetness which indicates that he has recovered from his illness. In the same way, when the living entity's normal consciousness is aberrated by ignorance, his only recourse is to repeatedly force himself to do devotional service, beginning with hearing about Kṛṣṇa. Nescience is thus destroyed, and he develops a taste (*ruci*) for devotional service.

The Two Types of Ruci

The taste for devotional service is of two types: *vastu vaisistya-apeksini* (that which awaits specific requirements) and *vastu vaisitya-anapeksini* (that which does not await any requirements). (*Vastu* means the object of worship-the Supreme Godhead.) In the first type of *ruci* certain requirements are desirable for hearing about Lord Kṛṣṇa and chanting His name, form, qualifies, pastimes, and so on in order for the devotee to develop a taste for them. For example, the devotee's attraction for *kirtana* and *bhajana is* very much dependent on accurate beat, rhythm, and sweet and appropriate melody; when listening to narrations of the Lord he is dependent on the sound of the voice; when he is worshipping the Deity he is dependent on such conditions as the sanctity of the place, punctuality, a sincere priest, and beautiful flower arrangements.

We may ask the question that if a man is truly starving does he care about the quality or variety of food he is offered to eat? If he does impose such conditions, then his appetite is lacking. The first type of *ruci* is similar in character to this seemingly hungry person, because even the slightest moral aberrations impel the devotee to dictate certain conditions for hearing and chanting the Lord's name. (Conditions such as the ones we discussed beforehand like the melody, the type of voice, and so on.) Therefore the type of *ruci* called *vastu vaisistya-apeksini* can be referred to

as the mercury that measures a devotee's internal discrepancies.
The second type *of ruci, vastu vaisistya-anapeksini,* is unlike the first type. A devotee who possesses the second type of *ruci* hears and chants the Lord's name, qualities, pastimes, and so on in a strong and steady way. When attractive embellishments are added to practices such as hearing and chanting, *ruci* gains maturity and uproots the last vestiges of bad qualities from the heart. (In the first type *of ruci* such conditions as the *kirtana* or *bhajana* having a beautiful melody was an indispensable requirement.)

The Type of Ruci Independent of Material Considerations

Some of the symptoms of *vastu vaisistya-anapeksini ruci* are that the devotee thinks, "Why have I foolishly exchanged the nectar of chanting Kṛṣṇa's name for misfortune in the form of material life, hankering after what I do not possess and toiling to protect what I have gained. Despicable wretch that I am, I think of advising others! The causeless mercy of my spiritual master has delivered to me a priceless treasure, yet I could not value it. Instead, I chased after the mirage of material happiness. I wasted my life in a futile search for broken pieces of colored glass thinking them gems and so found myself in a fathomless ocean of materialism. I avoided all devotional activities and shamefully exhibited moral bankruptcy. Alas! I am bereft of any good character. My tast was such that I considered spurious talk valuable and tried in vain to relish it. Consequently I turned my back on the narrations of the transcendental qualities and names of the Supreme Lord. How great is my misfortune! Whenever I had the opportunity to hear about Kṛṣṇa I fell asleep, but as soon as I heard any mundane ramblings I forgot my weariness and eagerly absorbed every word. In this way I endlessly insulted saintly persons and intruded on their assemblies. What abominable means had I not used to fill my belly. I am ignorant to the consequences of my actions; what hell will my behaviour force me to visit, and for how long?
Thus in this way a devotee must repent. And someday, by a streak of good fortune, he will come across the greatest of all literatures, the works that describe the transcendental glories of the Supreme Person ality of Godhead, Śrī Gauranga This literature captures the essence of the *Vedas,* which is said to be a mystical flowering tree fulfilling all desires. The devotee should become like a honey-bee who constantly drinks the ambrosia from the flower blossoms. Let the devotees seek the company of saints and shun the common crowds of moneymongers. Residing in holy

places, they must engage in serving the Supreme Lord with a pure heart. After serving the Lord with a pure heart, *ruci,* the divine dancer, then attracts the devotee's attention, and he aspires to learn dancing. The devotee should then associate with the *rasika-bhaktas* (those who meditate on the Lord's pastimes of conjugal love) who are expert in the same art of dancing and learn it from them. For the first time the devotee thus experiences an ecstasy beyond description. With the passage of time, when the two perfect dancemasters, *bhava* and *prema*, appear and teach the devotee the sublime dances, who can describe the heights of divine bliss he will climb.

MK 6: The Sixth Shower of Nectar

As *ruci* ripens, the Supreme Personality of Godhead becomes the devotee's only object of worship and meditation. This is described as the stage of *āsakti,* or attachment. *Āsakti* is like a cluster of buds unfurling from the main stem of the creeper of devotion. Shortly, some of these buds may blossom into the flowers of *bhava,* or loving sentiments, and others may mature into the fruits of *prema,* or love of Godhead.

Ruci and Āsakti

Ruci is the means to perfection, while *āsakti* is the goal, the object of worship, and meditation. In the case of *ruci*, the devotee increases these symptoms of *bhakti* (innate in both ruci and *āsakti)* by refining the process of devotional service. In the case of *āsakti,* the devotee achieves the same by surrendering to the attractions of the object (Kṛṣṇa). In essence both the end and the means qualify to become one, so at a certain stage of realization they are the same.

Confidential devotional service and meditation at the stage of *ruci* is not mature, but at the stage of *āsakti* it is properly mature. In that case we can conclude that the difference between ruci and *āsakti* lies in how mature is the devotee's confidential meditation. *Āsakti* is able to cleanse the mirror of the devotee's consciousness to the extent that the Supreme Lord is always reflected in it. In the early stages of *ruci* the devotee comments, “Alas! I am under heavy siege from materialistic life, so how can I bring my heart to the sanctuary of devotional service to the Supreme Lord?”

Such a sincere prayer releases one's consciousness from its material bondage and attaches it to the Supreme Lord. For the devotee at the *āsakti* stage before he even attempts such a prayer, he finds himself already attached to the Lord. All this is accomplished effortlessly.
At which particular juncture the neophyte devotee forgets the Supreme Lord's form, qualities, and so on and finds himself in the materialistic whirlpool is impossible to pinpoint. But the devotee in the stage of *āsakti* can easily determine at what point he severed ties with the materialistic concept of life and reposed his entire being in meditation on the Supreme Lord.

Dealings of the Devotees on the Platform of Āsakti

Next we shall discuss the dealings of a devotee who is on the platform of *āsakti*. If he meets a saintly person he humbly addresses him like this, 'Where are you coming from) Is that small casket you wear around your neck carrying a Salagrama-sila? I can hear you softly chanting the holy name and tasting the nectar, thus your tongue continuously vibrates Kṛṣṇa's name, hankering to relish its sweetness. It has been a great fortune that a wretch such as myself was able to meet you; I am now feeling immensely happy. Kindly tell me which holy places you have visited and the saintly souls you have met. Who were the self-realized devotees who blessed you by giving you the benefit of their spiritual insight? And which fortunate soul's life became spiritually enriched by your association?"
After some spiritual discussion the *āsakti* devotee goes on to another place. Meeting a professor of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* there he speaks to him, “By the sight of that uncommonly beautiful book under your arm, I take it that you are a scholar. I therefore request you to explain any passage from the Tenth Canto of the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam*. Kindly revive me with your ambrosial words, for my eager and parched mind is withering away.” The *Bhāgavatam* discourse brings him feelings of ecstasy, his body erupting in goose bumps.
Such a devotee on the *āsakti* platform then moves to another place in search of saintly association because any other company no longer attracts him. Coming upon an assembly of devotees, he cries out, “At last I have come to a place where I shall surely be blessed because this gathering of devotees will remove the evil within me.” He throws himself to the ground and speaks from the heart in utter humility. A *mahabhagavata,* who is the crest jewel of any Vaiṣṇava assembly, comes forward to receive the visitor and embraces him with warm affection, offering him a place to

sit. On his part, the newcomer feels hesitant but sits down humbly. He appeals to the Vaiṣṇavas, “O saviours of the fallen souls, you are the best healers for the plague of materialism. Kindly diagnose my malady and prescribe the proper medication and diet to restore my spiritual wellbeing.”

Tears streaking down his cheeks, such a devotee begs for the Vaiṣṇava's mercy. He eagerly awaits to hear their nectarean instructions and stays in their company for a week or so, filled with happiness, basking under their compassionate glances and always looking for opportunities to serve them to their full satisfaction.

On one occasion he accompanies a devotee for a walk in the woody glades. Upon seeing a herd of black antelopes he thinks, “If Lord Kṛṣṇa is truly merciful to me then those antelopes will approach me without fear, knowing me to be harmless, or else they will simply disappear into the woods.” How birds, beasts, and other natural phenomena react to him he also interprets either as Kṛṣṇa's mercy to him or His chastisement.

On another occasion, while walking past a village he sees a young *brahmana* boy engrossed in playing. He bows down before the boy, remembering such great sages as Sanaka and Sadananda, and asks him, “Shall I ever be able to find my Lord Vrajendra-Nandana Kṛṣṇa?” The inarticulate reply that the child gave at the time elated him, but at other times it leaves him feeling melancholy.

Once in a while this *āsakti* devotee feels like staying at his home. Here he broods like a greedy trader thinking, “Where can I go to? What shall I do? How can I acquire my most coveted of objects, my beloved Lord?” Listless, he so ponders with a sad, drawn countenance. Next moment he falls off to sleep, wakes up again and sits up with a blank faraway look. When family members gently question him on his uncanny behaviour he remains silent. At times he feels like offering some explanation but is forced to remain silent because he is unable to articulate his emotions. It starts to dawn upon the family members that he may be actually confused, or even mentally deranged, and the foolish neighbours simply regard him as mentally retarded. The logicians think him a fool, the Vedic scholars view him as one suffering from acute psychological aberrations. The *karmis,* or fruitive workers, avoid him as if he were depraved; and those who are suspicious and even offensive to devotees slander him, calling him arrogant, and so on. This way people brand him as mute and mad. In actual fact he is a highly-qualified devotee and a realized soul so elevated that he is unsullied by the mundane show of people offering him

respect or showering him with insults. He is as oblivious of the urbane as he is of the banalities of material existence. Such a devotee is swimming in the nectarean currents of devotion because of his strong attachments to the transcendental association of saintly devotees.

MK 7: The Seventh Shower of Nectar

Strong attachment *(āsakti)* is gradually transformed into *bhava,* or spontaneous spiritual emotion. *Bhava* later climaxes into *rati,* or the first stirrings of divine love. Eternality, absolute knowledge, and divine bliss *(sat, cit, ananda)* are emanations of the original state of consciousness, or the *svarūpa. Bhava is* the budding blossom of these three energies: *sat, cit,* and *ananda. Bhava* has also been described as the gleaming blossoms of the creeper of devotion.

The external splendour *bhava* exhibits is factually unattainable for the average person, and its internal grandeur makes the revered status of liberation insignificant. In truth, even a minute fraction of the splendour of *bhava* can thoroughly dispel any trace of ignorance in the human consciousness.

The sweet, far-reaching fragrance of the blossoms of *bhava* sends enchanting invitations to the Supreme Lord, gently inducing Him to appear in person before His devotee. Furthermore, when the soul's natural sentiments are even faintly scented by *bhava,* they melt and flow unrestrained toward the Supreme Lord, bathing His divine form with love. As soon as *bhava* appears in the devotee's heart it elevates him to a high podium of spiritual communion. Even if he happens to be born in a family of *candalas,* or dog-eaters, he is indeed to be revered even by *brahmanas,* the priestly class.

The Magnificient Symtnptoms of Bhava

The symptoms that embellish the sublime sentiments of *bhava* are magnificent: The devotee's eyes are constantly inebriated from seeing the beauty of Vrajendra-Nandana Kṛṣṇa-His complexion the colour of a monsoon cloud; His pinkish lips, His compassionate eyes; the brilliance of His perfect moonlike face with its innocent, gentle smile; and His shining yellow dress and radiantjewels. The devotee's voice chokes up as he

perceives the beauty of His Lord and tears flow incessantly' saturating his body. His eager ears strain to hear the haunting melody of Kṛṣṇa's flute, His captivating honeyed voice; they strain to hear all the instructions on serving and worshipping His lotus feet. The devotee experiencing *bhava-bhakti* restlessly moves about trying to collect any information about his beloved Lord and how to serve Him. The *bhava-bhakta* sometimes pauses in one spot, rooted to the ground as if he is trying to hear a faint voice, moving his head in different directions in order to hear better.
Bhava is self-willed and moves on it's own volition. The actions of a devotee in *bhava* are unpredictable-he may suddenly try to Imagine how it feels to be touched by the tender palms of the Lord, and when all the hairs of his body stand on end, it appears as if it is actually happening to him: On other occasions the devotee's nostrils flare from inhaling deeply the sweet lingering aroma of the Lord's transcendental body, sending him into raptures. Sometimes he thinks, “Shall I ever be fortunate enough to relish the ambrosia issuing from Kṛṣṇa's sublime lips?” Immediately he begins to lick his own lips as if his tastebuds have been given a magnificent treat only his cherished dream could fulfill. Again at times such a devotee experiences waves of pleasure transmitted from the Lord, the reservoir of all pleasures, and an ineffable joy envelops his heart, making him feel the same as when he sees the Lord face-to-face. In this way he becomes absorbed in the bliss of pure Kṛṣṇa consciousness. Occasionally these ecstatic feelings disappear, and the devotee plunges into a sea of deep despair and gloom. In this condition he nevertheless decorates his heart with *sancari-bhava* [one of the four kinds of *bhava*], thus reviving with renewed impetus his beleaguered spiritual sentiments. In *bhava-bhakti,* the devotee focuses his mind with unwavering attention on the Supreme Lord. In sleeping, waking, or dreaming he always remembers Kṛṣṇa. With incessant and intense desire to properly serve the Lord, the devotee in *bhava* discovers his original spiritual form. Naturally and perfectly gliding into that form, he more or less discards his *sadhaka* tabernacle. Now his sentiments, his entire being, yearns to be transformed into a bumble-bee humming and searching for honey around the lotuslike feet of the Supreme Lord. The devotee at this stage has acquired a priceless treasure trove, but he hides his wealth like a miser-his spiritual sentiments of *bhava*-and displays only abject poverty. Ordinary people are unable to appreciate the value of riches such as qualities of austerity, tolerance, and forgiveness in a person, whereas wise saints shower laurels on him. A nondevotee considers pure devotees like these to be either

scatter-brained or mad.
This *bhava* is of two kinds: *raga-bhakti-uttha* (springing from spontaneous devotional service) and *vaidha-bhakti-uttha* (springing from regulated devotional service). A devotee displaying the first kind of *bhava* (*raga-bhakti-uttha*) denounces worship in awe and reverence because he shies away from any awareness of position (*jati*) and scriptural knowledge and edicts (*pramana*). One relates to the Lord more or less on equal terms, thus lending depth and weight to this particular *bhava.*
The second kind lacks the intensity of the *jati* and *pramana* sentiment, and therefore *bhava* becomes influenced by the opulence of the Lord, thus reducing its weight and depth. Hence these two varieties of *bhava* are relished by its two kinds of devotees respectively in hearts laden with transcendental desires to serve, in two different ways.

Rasa—Spiritual Taste in Bhava

Now we shall discuss the different ways of relishing that *rasa*. Sweetness is present in different foods in varying degrees. Jackfruit is sweeter than mango, sugarcane sweeter than jackfruit, and raisins sweeter than the rest. Similarly, the different devotees relish varying intensities of *bhava* according to their taste, and this produces five variations: *santa* (neutral); *dasya* (servitude); *sakhya* (friendship); *vatsalya* (parental); and *mādhurya* (conjugal). *Bhava* is thus displayed as serenity in a *santa-bhakta*, as affection in a *dasya-bhakta,* as camaraderie in a *sakhya-bhakta*, as filial love in a *vatsalya-bhakta*, and as conjugal love in a *madhura-bhakta.*
These five kinds of *rasa,* according to their will, modify themselves as *vibhava, anubhava,* and *vyabhicari-bhava*. Then *sthayi-bhava,* the reigning king of *bhava*, surrounded by his subjects, the other *bhava*s, and in alliance with them, is transformed into the five *rasas*: *santa, dasya, sakhya, vatsalya,* and *mādhurya*. In other words *bhava* becomes metamorphosed into *rasa*. The following quotation from the Vedas lends authority to this, 'The Supreme Personality of Godhead is the embodiment of *rasa,* and the *jīva* exults upon receiving it."
Another truth arises from this quotation: For the many different bodies of water-ponds, lakes, streams, rivers-the ocean is their final destination and shelter. By the same token, the many incarnations of the Supreme Lord all display that *rasa*, but Lord Kṛṣṇa, the source of all incarnations, like the ocean is the only paramount emblem of that *rasa.* The initial transformations of *bhava* reveal the Supreme Lord to the devotee, and later in *prema* the *rasika* devotee directly perceives Him as the absolute

personification of the divine *rasa*.

In the Second Chapter we discussed the two leaves of *sadhana-bhakti* that unfolded from the creeper of devotion. Later, the creeper burgeoned forth flowers of *bhava*, and now shiny and delicate leaves known as *anubhava* have unfurled around those flowers. Those leaves are pretty and have been nurtured by hearing and chanting. Every so often the leaves infuse the buds to ripen into the nectarean fruits of *prema.* What is more wonderful is that the leaves, clusters, flowers, and fruits of the creeper of devotion, even after maturity, do not relinquish their innate nature. They flourish perennially in everfresh ways to lend beauty to the complete creeper.

Prema Inspires the Devotee's Consciousness

Alongside the blossoming of *prema,* marvellous changes occur. The devotee's consciousness, previously entrapped by materialistic attachments for home and family, is now inspired by *prema* to disdainfully discard them and set itself free. Just as the touchstone jewel transforms ordinary objects to, gems by touching them, by its potency *prema* also miraculously transforms earthly attachments and makes them shine with sublime resplendence like its own self. *Prema* enfolds these attachments and bathes them in the nectar of the Supreme Lord's transcendental name, beauty, qualities, and so on.

Rasa Attracts Kṛṣṇa

Prema has appeared like the radiant sun in the sky to overshadow the dim glow of the four *purusartha,* or Vedic goals. *Prema* is relishable only by tasting the *rasa* flowing from it. The intrinsic nature of this *rasa* is to inebriate the taster with immeasurable bliss. And the *Śakti,* or energy, who completely nourishes this *rasa* is described as one who attracts even Lord Kṛṣṇa to Herself. Thus when the devotee begins to experience this *rasa* he does not care for any obstacles or consider anything as a hindrance. He turns into a fearless knight clad in the strongest of armour, confident of his victory at all times. His mind becomes so absorbed like that of an avaricious thief coveting an immense treasure somewhere that devours his

every moment and robs him of all reason.
The devotee's eagerness for the Lord is like an insatiable hunger that is still unsatisfied even after being supplied with unlimited varieties and amounts of sweet milk preparations. (The devotee's eagerness, on one hand, is like the burning sun and on the other hand, like the cooling rays of a million moons.)"rhe raw power generated by the quality and degree of eagerness is contrary in nature to its soothing peacefulness. Although it seems impossible for these opposites to coexist in a person, the marvellous ways of *prema* chooses the pure devotee in whom to manifest this wonder.
The pure devotee thus begins to desire at every moment a direct audience with the Lord. The burning arrow of extreme eagerness lacerates him, it's intensity causing him dissatisfaction despite his exulting in the Supreme Lord's sublime beauty and arnbrosial pastimes. His desire fuels his frustration toward everything in general. Relations with friends, family, and other relatives lose meaning and resemble dried-up wells. His home looms ominously before him like a forest of thorny bushes and to even eat becomes a punishment. Praise pains like the bite from the poisonous fangs of a snake, and his daily chores and duties take on a deathly pallor. He carries the limbs of his body like unbearable weights. His well-wisher's consolations are like cloudbursts of noxious rains. His waking hours drown him in an ocean of repentance, and the rare moments of sleep become an intolerable torment. Living becomes a burden of guilt, a censure from providence. Like scorched paddy, meditations are devoid of substance, and activities, which had earlier given him satisfaction, now lack purpose. Even remembering the Lord's lotus feet becomes an excruciating effort and he feels as if someone was tearing him limb from limb.

Through Prema One can See the Lord

At a later stage *prema* assumes the character of a strong magnet drawing to itself even Lord Kṛṣṇa, the all-attractive iron, and one day *prema* arranges for the pure devotee a direct audience with the Lord. And the Supreme Lord reciprocates by revealing to the pure devotee His intimate., divine, and auspicious attributes such as His ravishing beauty; physical fragrance; melodious voice; everfresh youthfulness; versatile love; magnanimity, and compassion, which the pure devotees directly perceive with their senses. As these attributes are nectarean and dynamic, *prema* produces in the devotee's heart an ever-increasing, powerful desire to fully

relish the Lord's transcendental qualities. The devotee finds himself swimming in an unlimited ocean of bliss that no words can adequately describe.

The exultation of a devotee experiencing *prema* is likened to traveller who, after painfully traversing the burning desert sand in the middle of summer, finds an oasis cooled by a fresh stream gurgling under the shade of a huge banyan tree. The bliss of *prema* is further likened to the happiness a wild elephant feels after being trapped for days in a smouldering forest fire and then suddenly drenched in torrential rains; or like a gourmet, who after many days of sickness and being fed medicines and a bland, frugal diet becomes well and is given a feast. Of course, these descriptions offer merely an idea of the devotee's state of joy because it cannot be compared to any material happiness. Material happiness and spiritual happiness are totally different from each other by nature-material happiness is a product of *maya-śakti,* or the illusory potency, whereas the devotee's bliss directly comes from the Lord's internal spiritual potency, or *svarapa-śakti.*

How the Lord Reveals Himself to the Prema-bhakta

When *prema* blossoms, the Lord reveals first His form of matchless beauty to the enraptured devotee. The devotee's senses and mind become one and he beholds with all his senses the Lord's exquisite beauty. At the sight of the Lord's unparalleled beauty, the devotee feels ecstatic symptoms *(asta-sattvic vikara)* like being paralyzed, quivering, weeping, and so on. These ecstatic symptoms begin to hinder his vision of the Lord; not only that, but the exhilaration renders him unconscious.

Seeing the devotee's condition, the Lord consolingly manifests His second ambrosial attribute-His physical fragrance-which immediately arrests the devotee's sense of smell. Now all the devotee's senses withdraw from the sense of sight and rush to centre on the sense of smell. This overpowers him, and once again intense joy causes him to lose consciousness.

Kṛṣṇa once again rescues the devotee, and this time the Lord revives him with His melodious voice. The Lord speaks to him saying, “My dear devotee! I am now your captive, fully under your control. Do not be overwhelmed, just perceive Me and fulfil the desire of your heart”. The devotee's senses become surcharged and they seek to hear and absorb the sweet melody of his beloved Lord's voice. Again he is unable to contain his ecstacy and he becomes bereft of consciousness. Then the Lord, full of compassion, embraces the devotee with His body, displaying His fourth

nectarean opulence of tender youthfulness To the *dasya* denotee (mellow of servitorship) He places His lotus feet on his head; to the *sakhya* devotee (mellow of friendship) He entwines His lotus fingers with his fingers; to the *vatsala* devotee (parental mellow) the Lord wipes away his tears with His lotus hands; and to the *madhuiya* devotee (conjugal mellow) He draws him to His chest and wraps His arms around him in a tender embrace. From this we understand that the Lord reciprocates appropriately with the different mellows of each devotee's love.

Just as before, when the devotee swoons in indescribable joy, the Lord shows His fifth opulence, that of versatile loving exchanges. Kṛṣṇa offers the devotee sublime ambrosia in the form of chewed remnants from His mouth and lips. As the *bhakia* fully relishes it, his sense of taste becomes satiated. At this stage the Lord appears to His devotee who is now absorbed in the conjugal mellow, and initiates him into a transcendental emotional exchange of intense loving intimacy, long coveted by him. Of course, the Lord never divulges such a confidential mood to any other devotee except one who is in *mādhurya-rasa* (conjugal mellow).

Once again the devotee is drawn into an overwhelming mood of divine bliss from this intimate encounter with the Lord, and again he swoons. The Lord's succor to him this time is in the form of showers of *audarya,* or magnanimity-His sixth transcendental attribute. In this condition the devotee will not respond to any consoling. *Audarya* in this instance means when all the transcendental attributes of the Lord are at one. time forced onto the devotee's conglomerate senses: sight, hearing, mind. *Prema* now responds almost as if to the Lord's bidding. It waxes by leaps and bounds, and the devotee's thirst for it increases proportionately. Gradually, like the waxing moon, these transcendental attributes combine together to mature fully. Uncountable like the waves in the ocean of unlimited bliss, a plethora of transcendental pastimes helps *prema* to stir and shatter the devotee's heart. *Prema* then installs itself in the devotee's mind as its guardian deity, repairing and rebuilding his inner being. *Prema* radiates its energy, *audarya,* in such a way that the devotee is able to relish unhindered all of the Lord's transcendental qualities.

Thus it cannot be refuted that the devotee can taste to his complete satisfaction all the different qualifies of the Lord, nor can it be argued that he relishes full bliss at this stage. This is possible owing to the Lord's wonderful and inconceivable potency that helps the devotee concurrently perceive all of the Lord's attributes with his five senses and the mind. This naturally inspires the devotee beyond imagination.

These transcendental topics are outside the jurisdiction of mundane logic. The *Upaniṣad* confirms this: *acintydh bhava ye bhava na tamstarkena-yojayeta.* “Spiritual subject matter is inconceivable to the mind hence beyond the realm of mundane thoughts and arguments.”
The pure devotee is eager to relish altogether each of the Lord's sublime attributes such as His exquisite beauty. Butjust as a swallow with its beak shut tight is unable to slake its thirst even when it rains, so the devotee isalso helpless on. his own against the Lord's opulences inundating his senses. Seeing the devotee's predicament the Lord thinks, “Is this confusion the purpose of My matchless beauty?” So the Lord offers to the devotee His seventh opulence, compassion. This opulence is the headmistress of all the other attributes. It is she who is enthroned in the corolla of the eight-petalled lotus constituting the eight potencies like Vimala, Utkarsini, and so on, known collectively as *svarūpa-śakti* (the Lord's internal potency).

The Lord's Compassion is the Crown Jewel of His Attributes

This seventh opulence of the Lord is also known as *anugraha,* or mercy. She manifests herself in the Lord's lotus eyes in varied splendour. To the *dasya-bhakta* she is compassion, to the *vatsalya-bhakta* she is filial fondness, and to the *mādhurya-bhakta* she is heart-melting magnetic power. In this way she appears in different loving moods of the devotees. The Lord's *krpa-śakti* (mercy potency) induces the all-pervasive *iccha-śakti,* or independent will, to reach out to the sinful souls and create in them emotional variety *(raga).* The influence of *icchi-śakti* fills the great *atmaramas* or self-satisfied enlightened persons, with wonder and takes them to great heights of spiritual splendour. In fact, it is once again Kṛṣṇa's *krpa-śakti* that brings to light the Lord's magnanimous attribute of *bakta-vatsalya,* or protective feelings and affection towards His surrendered devotees. Mother Earth's speech in the First Canto of *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (SB* 1.16.26-29) is very enlightening, and reveals that the Lord's excellences (such as His truthfulness, purity, and so on) are all-auspicious and transcendental, and they act on the directive received from *krpa-śakti. Krpa-śakti,* the regal queen, directs Kṛṣṇa's *bakta-vatsalya* potency. This *bhakta-vatsalya* potency, in turn, reigns supreme over all the other qualities of the Lord.

The Eighteen Faults

The scriptures have identified eighteen human shortcomings that go

against its tenets. They are as follows: illusion, sleepiness, uncivility, lust, greed, madness, envy, cruelty, lamentations, over-endeavour, deceit, anger, desire, fear, mistakes, intolerance, and dependence. The scriptures proclaim that the Lord's qualities are absolutely free from these discrepancies. Occasionally, *krpa-śakti* arranges the display of some of these discrepancies in the dealings of Kṛṣṇa, Rama, and so on, and the devotees then perceive them. By the ingenuity of *krpa-śakti,* however, these same faults are transformed from banality to divine magnificance. They become converted to transcendental excellences embellishing the Lord's personality. In order to delight in the Lord's divine qualities, which the Lord Himself so explicitly exhibits, the enlightened and powerful devotees in the later stage of *prema* has to constantly and repeatedly relish them. Simultaneously, as these qualities blossom to their fullest possible expression, the devotee's heart floods with wonder, sweeping him to perfection. He relishes that the Lord's *bhakta-vatsalya* quality (protective love for His devotees) is beyond compare. Again and again he remembers the Lord's magnanimity, melting his heart with sublime emotions. The Supreme Lord acknowledges His devotee's feelings and says to him, “My dear devotee, you have sacrificed wife, children, wealth, and home countless times in many births. You have tolerated such sufferings as the ravages of scorching summers, freezing winters, hunger, thirst, pain, and disease only so you could serve Me as I had asked you to. You have disregarded a million humiliations from others and maintained your life by begging, yet so far I have been unable to reciprocate with you and offer you anything. This makes Me indebted to you. Now tell Me, what can I offer you? Lordship of the entire universe, the position of Lord Brahma, all the mystic opulences, and so on are not befitting, hence how can I offer them to you? Is it becoming of a gentleman to offer grass, straw, and other animal fodder to a human being? Considering all this, I offer Myself to you; although I am unconquerable and indomitable, I am won over by you-I am now your property. I shall simply depend on your gentle disposition.” The Lord's ambrosial words enter the devotee's ears like pearly drops of nectar.

The devotee replies, “My dear Lord! O Supreme Person! You are an ocean of mercy. Seeing me swept away by the swift currents of gross materialism and becoming the helpless prey of the cruel venomous snake of Time, You took pity on me. Your petal-soft heart melted, and to remove my lust and nescience You appeared before me as the most perfect spiritual preceptor. Your appearance is awe-inspiring, like the powerful presence of the

Sudarsana Cakra is to His natural energies, You thus rescued me from the horrendous poisonous fangs and grim black coils of the snake of Time.
“Your intention is to elevate me to become Your maidservant so I can serve Your divine lotus feet, and so You have made Yourself available in the form of the most purifying of syllables—Your holy names—which are nondifferent from You. Your holy names enter my ears and alleviate my excruciating pain, allowing me to repeatedly hear, chant, and remember Your transcendental names and pastimes.
“You are reforming me. Although you have kindly placed me in the assembly of Your pure eternal associates and taught the process of surrender to You, I am so flagitious and fallen that I did not serve you even for a moment. I am fit to be severely rebuked for this atrocious act. Yet You spared me and instead made my eyes drink the most sublime vision—that of Your beatific face. And still you say, 'Now I am indebted to you'?
“These words spoken by my beloved Lord have deeply disturbed me. At this juncture I am thinking about my next course of action. To ask to be pardoned for the sins of a few lifetimes, nay a million lifetimes, would be audacious on my part. In fact I feel my wicked offences number more than trillions and have been accumulating since time immemorial. I have already suffered some of their consequences and whatever is left, let me face them, for I refuse to beg for them to be absolved.
“Of late, I have deeply realized the gravity of my offences. I have foolishly compared the Supreme Lord's beautiful form and complexion to the billowing monsoon clouds, or to a blushing bluish lotus flower, or even to a sparkling blue sapphire. I have drawn poetic parallels between His exquisite face and the rising full moon, or the splendour of His delicate feet and the tender leaves of spring. These analogies are as amiss as when a scorched mustard seed is compared to a mountain of glittering gold, an ordinary chickpea to an invaluable touchstone gem, a lowly sly fox to the regal lion, and a miserable mosquito to the awe-inspiring Garuda. I sincerely regret having committed these gross blunders. These were the times when I thought that my glorifications of the Lord were indeed poetic, but in fact I shamelessly paraded my puerile learning for all to see.
“All that is past. From now onward when my eyes behold even for a moment the Lord's sublime loveliness, my words, like an untethered and restless calf, will not distort the truth in a futile attempt to describe His pristine beauty.”

The Lord Reciprocates with His Devotee's Love

These words of endless remorse and lamentation flow freely from the devotee. This pleases the Lord immensely. The Lord reciprocates with the *preyasi* mood, the mood of a stricken beloved for her lover, which these elevated devotees exhibit. He fulfils their yearnings and immediately manifests Vṛndāvana, the land immortalized for staging His transcendental pastimes. There the devotee sees Kṛṣṇa with His most beloved *gopī*, Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, daughter of King Vrsabhanu. This *maha-yoga pitha* is like the wish-fufilling tree. The Divine Couple is surrounded by Lallta-devi and the other girlfriends and maidservants of Rādhārāṇī. Kṛṣṇa's friend Subala, and others are also present. Those *gopīs* who consider themselves the Divine Couple's maids-in-attendance and who are completely dependent on the Lord for everything, are gathered around Them. The devotee can see the river Yamuna, Govardhana Hill, Bhandira-vana, and he can also see Nandisvara-giri where Kṛṣṇa's father and mother Nanda Mahārāja and Yasoda-devi are. The devotee sees Kṛṣṇa's brother, Baladeva and His friends, and Nanda's household servants and maid-servants as well as all the residents of Vṛndāvana. After revealing to the devotee scenes drenched with superexcellent divine mellows, immersing him in waves of incomparable bliss, Kṛṣṇa suddenly disappears along with all His associates.

The Symptoms of Prema

Thereafter, the devotee becomes more or less aware of himself and his immediate surroundings. His eyes flutter open and, finding that his beloved Lord is nowhere to be seen, he begins to pine for Him. Unrestrained tears pour down his cheeks in streams. He ponders, “Was I in a dream? No, if it were so I would be still drowsy and my eyes would be sticky from sleep. Then was it all created by someone's mystic powers? That is also not plausible, because the bliss I experienced is not an illusion or something mundane. Maybe it was a hallucination, an error of the mind. That is also not true, otherwise I would feel restless and my heart empty. Could it be all a fabrication of a fertile imagination? No, this experience is beyond the capacity of any imagination. The other possibility is that the Lord's vision may suddenly appear in the mind's eye because of extreme happiness. This is also ruled out because on every previous occasion when I saw the Lord I can remember what they were like, but my present experience is far more unique than those.”

In this way the devotee, assailed by doubts, falls to the ground, rolling in the dust. At times he reverts to constantly entreating the Lord to show Himself again. When the Lord does not appear he is grief-stricken and renews rolling on the ground so vigorously that he causes pain to his body. Finally, the devotee loses consciousness and goes into an ecstatic coma. Some time later he awakes, jumps up, sits down, or weeps incessantly, wailing in a loud voice like a madman. Then suddenly the devotee stops all activities and retreats into a grave silence. On other occasions the afflicted devotee simply neglects all his regular religious and other duties, behaving whimsically and loosely. Again for no apparent reason he begins to speak incoherently like a lunatic. If a devotee friend approaches him with good intentions to pacify him and to make confidential enquiries about his condition, the devotee immediately reveals to his friend everything he has experienced. His friend tries to reason with him saying, “My friend, your immense good fortune has enabled you to directly rneet the Supreme Lord!"

For a while he becomes again calm and composed. Glowing with profound happiness he says, “But alas! Shall I ever behold again His exquisite face?” In the next moment he is plunged into deep despondency and he cries out, “How unfortunate I am! By the grace of a highly enlightened and pure devotee of the Lord I was able to see the Lord's divine and beautiful form. But a mountain of misfortune obstructed me from performing even the slightest devotional service to the Lord. The sudden appearance of the Lord before me was certainly due to some incalculable heaps of piety, but because of immeasurably grievous offences He is now lost from my vision.”

Or the bereft devotee thinks, “Kṛṣṇa is so merciful that He awarded me His direct audience although I am an insignificant speck floating in an ocean of bad qualities. This is because His mercy is causeless, hence He appeared to me. It is because of some unimaginable good fortune that the boundless ocean was for a few moments in the palm of my hand? But alas! my terrible faults have made this ocean disappear. My ignorance prevents me from discovering what actually happened. The whole experience has dumbfounded me and turned me into a fool. Where can I go? What shall I do? To whom shall I turn to for answers? I feel the world empty and void, absent of any companions, friends, or dear ones; a planet without a sanctuary; a world aflame in a raging forest fire eager to devour me. Under these circumstances, let me go to a secluded place away from crowds so I can meditate on this subject for some time.”

But even a quiet retreat does not bring him tranquillity. He calls out to the Lord, “O my Supreme Master! My beautiful Lord! Your face is like the blossoming lotus. O reservoir of divine nectar, all of Vrndavana is intoxicated. and aroused by the fragrance of Your transcendental body. The swaying garland of wildflowers around Your neck is attracting the honey bees and making them restlessly buzz around it. How can I again have even a moment's glimpse of Your charming face? Only once have I relished the nectar of Your sublime beauty; will it be possible for- me to again taste that delectable ambrosia? I humbly beg You to reveal Yourself to me.”
In this way the devotee laments, sighing, and sometimes rolling in the dust. At times he collapses into an ecstatic state of unconsciousness or suddenly runs hither and thither like a madman. He sees Kṛṣṇa in every direction and exuberantly laughs, sings, and dances simultaneously. But in the very next moment he breaks down and cries hot tears of remorse. The devotee can thus pass the rest of his life in pursuit of such transcendental symptoms of ecstasy, but never more does he pamper his body. In other words he is unconcerned about his physical wellbeing, feeling it unnecessary to enquire into its needs. After the demise of his body the devotee attains his eternal spiritual form (*siddha-deha)* and engages in the Lord's service. Factually, the devoteee understands he has reached that siddha-deha stage when he becomes oblivious to his body. He thus thinks, “The Supreme Lord, who is an ocean of compassion, has appeared on my plea, and He will personally engage me in His direct service and take me to His eternal abode.” With this understanding the devotee feels crowned with success.

Śraddhā—the First Step to Prema

The scriptures list as follows the different stages of elevation that lead to prema :

1) *Śraddhā* (faith in the words of the *guru* and the scriptures)
2) *Sadhu-sanga* (the urge to associate with saintly souls to gain spiritual knowledge)
3) *Bhajana-kria* (rendering devotional service under the guidance of the *guru*)
4) *Anartha-nivṛtti* (the removal of unwanted desires in the heart)
5) *Niṣṭhā* (steadiness in devotional service, or using superior intelligence to develop a taste for devotional service)

6) *Āsakti* (single-minded attachment to devotional service, performed by meditating on Lord Kṛṣṇa's eternal pastimes. These eternal pastimes appear in the devotee's heart spontaneously, by their own will, *svarasiki-bhava*)
7) *Bhava* (serving the Lord with spontaneous devotional sentiments)
8) *Prema* (awakening of love of Godhead).

These systematic levels, beginning with *śraddhā* to *prema* that Rūpa Gosvāmī proffers in the scriptures are finely presented.

Beyond Prema—the Loftier Regions of Bhakti

Beyond these eight levels, the scriptures describe with precision further stages of advancement in the realm of spiritual realization. If a tree represents *bhakti,* or true devotional service, these lofty devotional exchanges with the Lord can be described as the mature fruits that ripen on the upper branches of the tree of *bhakti.* These devotional exchanges are defined as follows:
Sneha (when the heart melts with excessive love)
Mana (extreme *sneha* that uncovers new, delightful regions of loving exchanges, making the beloved externally behave in a capricious way)
Pranaya (a type of *mana* that induces the beloved to feel on equal terms with the lover thus bringing about quarrels of love between them)
Raga (conflicting emotions in the beloved-sometimes of unbearable lamentation and sometimes of extreme happiness-while waiting expectantly to meet her lover, Kṛṣṇa)
Anuraga (love that makes the beloved experience her old lover as if meeting Him for the very first time)
Mahābhava (the highest expression of love with all its diversity and complexity. This is not found in any of the other loving exchanges).
These elevated regions of divine love are inaccessible to a (practitioner). He cannot taste the transcendental fruit. The *sadhaka-bhakta* is incapable of absorbing and manifesting the tempestuous and contradictory emotions generated by pure spiritual love within himself, therefore details of these topics have been deliberately excluded.
The different symptoms of *ruci, āsakti, bhava,* and *prema* described in this book are meant to give one the knowledge simply of how to recognize them. Although there are sufficient *sastric* evidences regarding these subjects they have not been mentioned, because if one bases everything on evidences then this subtle path shown by *guru* and Kṛṣṇa Himself may

be encumbered by unnecessary and harsh deceptions. Although this section of the book precludes the abstruse, the purpose of this section was not to merely introduce if anyone is insisting on evidences then a few verses from *Śrīmad Bhāgavatam* are cited to act as a guide. The following relevant passages from the scriptures are therefore presented as a conclusion to reiterate the main themes of the book:
This verse from *Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam* (1.5.27) describes *ruci*:

tasmiṁs tadā labdha-rucer mahā-mate
priyaśravasy askhalitā matir mama
yayāham etat sad-asat sva-māyayā
paśye mayi brahmaṇi kalpitaṁ pare

O great sage, as soon as I got a taste of the Personality of Godhead, my attention to hear of the Lord was unflinching. And as my taste developed, I could realize that it was only in my ignorance that I had accepted gross and subtle coverings, for both the Lord and I are transcendental.
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (3.25.15) *gives an example of āsakti:*

cetaḥ khalv asya bandhāya
muktaye cātmano matam
guṇeṣu saktaṁ bandhāya
rataṁ vā puṁsi muktaye

The stage in which the consciousness of the living entity is attracted by the three modes of material nature is called conditional life. But when that same consciousness is attached to the Supreme Personality of Godhead, one is situated in the consciousness of liberation.
Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.5.26) further describes *ruci*:

tatrānvahaṁ kṛṣṇa-kathāḥ pragāyatām
anugraheṇāśṛṇavaṁ manoharāḥ
tāḥ śraddhayā me 'nupadaṁ viśṛṇvataḥ
priyaśravasy aṅga mamābhavad ruciḥ

O Vyāsadeva, in that association and by the mercy of thole great Vedantists, I could hear them describe the attractive activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa. And listening attentively, my tast for hearing of the Personality of Godhead increased at every step.
This verse describes prema:

premātibhara-nirbhinna-
pulakāṅgo 'tinirvṛtaḥ
ānanda-samplave līno
nāpaśyam ubhayaṁ mune
(SB 1.6.17)

O Vyāsadeva, at that time, being exceedingly overpowered by feelings of happiness, every part of my body became separately enlivened. Being absorbed in an ocean of ecstasy, I could not see both myself and the Lord.

This verse describes how *ruci* acts:

tasmin mahan-mukharitā madhubhic-caritra-
pīyūṣa-śeṣa-saritaḥ paritaḥ sravanti
tā ye pibanty avitṛṣo nṛpa gāḍha-karṇais
tān na spṛśanty aśana-tṛḍ-bhaya-śoka-mohāḥ
(SB 4.29.40)

My dear king! in that place (where pure devotees live) if one gets a chance to hear their constant flow of nectar which is exactly like the waves of a river, one will forget the necessities of life—hunger thirst—and will become immune to all kinds of fear, lamentation and illusion.

Śrīmad Bhāgavatam also describes how *āsakti* influences a devotee.

śṛṇvan su-bhadrāṇi rathāṅga-pāṇer
janmāni karmāṇi ca yāni loke
gītāni nāmāni tad-arthakāni
gāyan vilajjo vicared asaṅgaḥ
(SB 11.2.39)

The transcendental appearance, activities and name of the Supreme Lord, who held up the chariot wheel, must be glorified and heard by wandering saints who have no material attachments.

The following evidence describes how one should perceive *rati:*

yathā bhrāmyaty ayo brahman
svayam ākarṣa-sannidhau
tathā me bhidyate cetaś
cakra-pāṇer yadṛcchayā
(SB 7.5.14)

O brahmanas! as iron attracted by a magnetic stone Moves automatically toward the magnet, my consciousness having being changed by His will, is attracted by Lord Viṣṇu who carries a disc in His hand. Thus I have no independence.

The symptoms of prema are described:

evaṁ-vrataḥ sva-priya-nāma-kīrtyā
jātānurāgo druta-citta uccaiḥ
hasaty atho roditi rauti gāyaty
unmāda-van nṛtyati loka-bāhyaḥ
(SB 11.2.40)

The devotee attains the blessed stage of prema vowing to incessantly chant the holy name of His dearmost Lord. The ecstacy of prema melts his heart and he laughs, cries, becomes restless, sings and danceslike a madman, oblivious of everything and everyone around him.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (1.6.33) describes *sphurti* (momentary vision of the Lord) :

pragāyataḥ sva-vīryāṇi
tīrtha-pādaḥ priya-śravāḥ
āhūta iva me śīghraṁ
darśanaṁ yāti cetasi

The Supreme Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa whose glories and activities are pleasing to hear, at once appears on the seat of my heart, as if called for, as soon as as I begin to chant His holy activities.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (3.25.35) discusses the direct meetings with the Lord:

paśyanti te me rucirāṇy amba santaḥ
prasanna-vaktrāruṇa-locanāni
rūpāṇi divyāni vara-pradāni
sākaṁ vācaṁ spṛhaṇīyāṁ vadanti

O My mother, My devotees always see the smiling ace of My form, with eyes like the rising morning sun. They like to see My various transcendental forms, which are all benevolent, and they also talk favourably with Me.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (3.25.36) describes the condition of the devotee after he sees the Lord face-to-face:

tair darśanīyāvayavair udāra-
vilāsa-hāsekṣita-vāma-sūktaiḥ
hṛtātmano hṛta-prāṇāṁś ca bhaktir
anicchato me gatim aṇvīṁ prayuṅkte

Upon seeing the charming forms of the Lord, smiling and attractive, and hearing His very pleasing words, the pure devotee almost loses all other consciousness. His senses are freed from all other engagements, and he becomes absorbed in devotional service. Thus in spite of his unwillingness, he attains liberation without separate endeavour.

A Synopsis of this Book

After analyzing these verses the relevant evidences can be clearly ascertained.

The essence of everything discussed in this book can be, presented in summary form. *Ahankara*, false pride, has two characteristics: *ahanta* (self-engrossment), and *mamata* (attachment). By becoming attached to the body and everything related to the body, the *jīva* is kept enthralled. But by cultivating knowledge these two characteristics of false pride are destroyed, and the *jīva* becomes liberated.

Prema is defined as the state when the *jīva* thinks himself a member of the Lord's family and His eternal servant, and he worships only the Supreme Lord and His eternal associates, Meditating in this way, through knowledge of the self *(ahanta,* the *jīva* desires to serve the Lord and His eternal associates, and he develops attachment *(mamata)* for the Supreme Personality of Godhead.

In truth, *prema* is indeed transcendental to material entanglement and more rare than liberation. It is described as being the pinnacle of all material and spiritual pursuits-the ultimate destination of all the scriptures.

A synopsis of the salient features of this book follows. it is formatted in a systematic way, tracing the gradual development of different spiritual conditions.

Good fortune transforms the false ego and gross material attachments. These are replaced by self-knowledge and attachment to the ways of a devotee; this consciousness becomes firm, and the devotee thinks, “I shall become a householder Vaiṣṇava and worship only the Supreme Lord.” (Ultimately, the cause of such a conviction is the saintly soul's

compassionate nature.)
Now *paramarthiki śraddhā* enters his heart very slightly; he then becomes eligible to begin the process of pure devotional service. Later, by constantly associating with saintly persons his slight *paramarthiki śraddhā* deepens, and *bhajana-kriya* is initiated. As long as *bhajana-kriya* remains *aniṣṭhitā.* (regulative, not spontaneous) his *ahanta* and *mamata* are partially projected onto spiritual activities, but he is still fully aware of the material world.
When *bhajana-kriya* becomes *niṣṭhitā,* or concentrated and more spontaneous, then mundane engrossment is practically destroyed, and the devotee experiences the profoundity of spiritual consciousness. *Ruci* (taste) then increases the attachments for internal spiritual development and material life becomes distant and only a matter of utility, rather than of necessity.
This attachment for the spiritual enhances the internal spiritual experiences to an intense level, thus diminishing material experiences to insignificance.
When *bhava* enters, spirituality is at a stage where devotional sentiments are continuously intense and material phenomena sometimes appears faintly distant and at other times totally non-existent.
Again at the initial stages of *bhajana-kriya,* meditation on the Supreme Lord is in little flashes and is always intruded upon by material thoughts. In *niṣṭhitā,* the *dhyana* (meditation) is hardly interrupted. In the stage *of ruci* the meditation is for longer periods and without external interruptions. In *āsakti,* the meditations are deep and profound, and in the *bhava* stage the Suprere Lord appears immediately in the meditation. Finally, in *prema,* exchanges with the Supreme are constant, direct, and personal.